

FIVE WAYS TO INTERACT WITH A PERSON LIVING WITH A DISABILITY

1. Use “person centered” language.

Rather than saying a person “is disabled” instead say a person “has a disability”. This acknowledges that person as an individual with many traits rather than labeling them only by their disability.

Example: Say “Grace has Autism” rather than “Grace is autistic.”

2. Make eye contact and speak directly to the person.

Treat a person with a disability with the same respect that you would a typical person. Look at them and speak normally. Assume that the person can hear and understand you until they indicate otherwise.

3. Ask a person with a disability if they need help before acting.

People with disabilities may move awkwardly, or more slowly, than typically abled folks do. Be careful to ask if help is needed before doing anything, especially touching the person, their wheelchair or other adaptive equipment.

4. Ask polite questions when appropriate.

It is ok to ask questions in a respectful way, however, be thoughtful about not interrupting a task or a social situation.

Some people with disabilities have been injured or had an illness that caused the disability. The details could make some uncomfortable. Be prepared when asking questions and avoid expressing shock or horror at the answers.

5. Avoid condescension or pity.

Many people with disabilities say that they would not change their situation if they could. For some, the state they are in is a vast improvement over when they were first injured or ill. For others, this has been their condition for their entire life and so it is their “normal”. Pity and condescension assumes that the person feels like a victim of their circumstance, which very often is not the case. When speaking about people with disabilities, avoid saying that person is “a victim” of “a condition” or is “confined” to a wheelchair. Instead, go back to person centered language. Example: Say Jane “has” a condition or “lives” with a condition, or John “uses” a wheelchair.

*As the only ACCREDITED service dog training program in Indiana, ICAN has brought together dogs, offenders and people living with disabilities to provide hope for more enriched and independent living. **To learn more, visit www.icandog.org or call 317-672-3864.***