



What to Say

Do use respectful terms like:

- Neurodivergent
- Person with mental health disability
- Person with a disability
- Person using a wheelchair/walker
- Disabled person
- Little person
- Deaf/hard of hearing
- Blind/low vision

Don't use hurtful terms like:

- Retarded/spaz/challenged
- Special needs/differently abled
- Insane/crazy
- Wheelchair-bound
- Handicapped/handicapable
- Invalid/crippled/slow
- Victim/sufferer
- Midget
- Deaf and dumb/deaf and mute

What to Keep in Mind

- ▶ Treat adults as adults and independent people, not as children, just like you would treat anyone without a disability.
- ▶ Ask about a person's disability only if it's relevant, if the person offers the information, or if you know the person well.
- ▶ Offer to help only if the person is visibly struggling. If the person asks for help or accepts your offer, follow their instructions.
- ▶ Speak directly to the person, not the interpreter, aide, or companion.
- ▶ Don't pet or distract a service animal.
- ▶ Remember that people with disabilities know themselves just like you do: their likes, dislikes, abilities, limitations, etc.
- ▶ Know that many disabilities are not visible.
- ▶ If you make a mistake, apologize, correct it, learn from it, and move on.

**INTELLECTUAL,
DEVELOPMENTAL,
MENTAL HEALTH, AND
COMMUNICATION**

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

Accessibility Considerations

When hosting an event, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the event being held in an accessible location, including bathrooms?
- If the event is virtual, is it being held on an accessible platform?
- Are you including access language in event promotions?
- Are you prepared to hire accessibility professionals (ASL interpreters, captioners, audio describers)?

Learn More

Office of the Chief Disability Officer
New York State Capitol
Room 245
Albany, NY 12224
ny.gov/cdo
accessibility@exec.ny.gov



When you're interacting with someone...

...who has communication or speech disabilities

When the person is speaking:

- ▶ Be patient, encouraging, and attentive.
- ▶ If you don't understand something they said, repeat what you understood and ask for them to repeat or rephrase it, write it down, or tell you in a different way.
- ▶ **Don't** interrupt, speak for them, or finish their sentences.

When you're speaking:

- ▶ Speak in a regular tone and don't oversimplify.
- ▶ Ask a single question at a time and give enough time to answer.
- ▶ Try to ask short questions that prompt short answers or head nods in return.

...with mental health disabilities

DO:

- ▶ Show compassion and listen without judgment.
- ▶ Validate and acknowledge their feelings.
- ▶ Keep in mind that it is rare for a person with mental illness to be violent.
- ▶ Remember that the person has hopes, wants, and needs.
- ▶ Ask how you can help.

DON'T:

- ▶ Give unsolicited advice.
- ▶ Blame the person or tell them to get over it.
- ▶ Assume they are less intelligent, have poor judgment, can't handle stress, or need special treatment.

...with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs)

- ▶ Be patient, flexible, and encouraging.
- ▶ Don't talk down to the person.
- ▶ Consider and avoid situations that may overwhelm them.
- ▶ If they are easily distracted, gently redirect them.
- ▶ Remember that there is a wide range of IDDs, so the individual may have difficulty communicating, learning, or socializing.

When you're speaking:

- ▶ Speak **with** them rather than **about** them.
- ▶ Speak in clear sentences using simple words and concepts.
- ▶ Break up information into parts.
- ▶ Rephrase or repeat as needed.
- ▶ Allow 5 or more seconds for the person
- ▶ Recap key points at the end of a conversation and ask questions to make sure the person understands them.

**CALL.****CHAT.**

If you are or someone you know is in crisis, call or text 988 or chat 988lifeline.org/chat for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, use your preferred relay service or dial 711, then 988.

New York State also partners with Crisis Text Line, an anonymous texting service available 24/7. Text GOT5 to 741741 or Got5U to 741741 if you're a college student.