



Disability Guidelines

Supporting disabled people in health settings to improve communication and accessibility

- Put the person before the impairment.
- Ask before you help, don't assume they need it.
- Think before you speak.
- Don't make assumptions.
- Respond graciously to requests.
- Speak directly to the person initially, not their support person if they have one.
- Always include the person in decision-making.
- Be patient, supportive, flexible.
- Ensure that whānau and support people are aware of any decisions made.



Specific Disabilities



People who are mobility impaired

- Don't push a wheelchair without being asked.
- Keep ramps and accessible entrances clear.
- Be aware of reach limits.
- Identify fall hazards and correct them.



People who are visually impaired or blind

- Always introduce yourself and your position.
- If guiding someone, offer your arm, do not take theirs.
- If someone has a guide dog, walk on the opposite side to do it.
- If you are giving directions, give specific, non-visual information.
- If you need to leave a person who is blind, inform them first and let them know where the exit is.
- Don't touch a guide dog or cane.
- Offer to read written information.
- If you need to leave a person who is blind, inform them first, let them know where the exit is, then leave them near a wall, table, or some other landmark rather than in the middle of a room.



People who are hard of hearing, deaf or have speech impairments

- Facilitate lip reading by facing into the light and keeping your mouth unobstructed. Remove your facemask if appropriate but maintain social distancing.
- Ask people what form of communication works best e.g. write instead of speak.
- Rephrase sentences rather than repeat.
- Do not shout.



People with cognitive impairments (learning disabilities)

- If you need to repeat yourself, use different wording.
- If people are easily distracted, redirect politely.
- People with brain injuries may have short-term memory difficulties and may repeat themselves.
- Provide information gradually and clearly.
- Reduce background noise if possible to avoid sensory overload.



People with autism spectrum disorder or sensory impairments

- Minimise non-essential sensory input if possible.
- Loud noises, fluorescent lights and flashing lights can cause severe sensory overload.
- Large groups can be overstimulating or overwhelming.
- People may communicate in different ways e.g. spoken words, writing, gestures and sounds.
- When communicating give plenty of processing time.
- Do not insist on eye contact, it can be uncomfortable or threatening.
- Be mindful that people's tone of voice, body language or facial expression may not match what they intend to communicate.
- People may prefer routine and predictability.

For further information refer to the Office for Disability Issues
<https://www.odi.govt.nz/home/about-disability/disability-etiquette>