

Fact Sheet 4: Let's talk Communication

Many people have difficulty working with people with communication impairments because they “don't want to do the wrong thing”. Follow this practical advice and gain the confidence to communicate with everyone in your community.

For people who may have a Communication or Speech Impairment

- Some people with a speech impairment may have difficulty understanding speech as well, but many do not – so don't assume.
- Speak in a normal voice and, where possible, talk in a quiet environment.
- Be patient and don't take over the conversation because you are afraid you won't understand the person speaking.
- Don't be afraid to ask the person to repeat themselves or re-word what they have said if you don't understand.
- A person with complex communication needs may use a communication aid such as a picture communication board or talking device. When you are talking with a person with complex communication needs, wait for them to finish what they are writing and/or saying before you respond.
- If you are unsure of what the person has said, ask if they can give you a clue to the subject, and if they have a communication aid, ask them to spell a word or write down what they have said.
- If the person is using an electronic communication aid, stand in front of the person and refrain from reading over their shoulder as they type.

For people who have a hearing impairment or are deaf:

For communication

- Always face the customer so they can read your lips.
- Try to make sure there are no bright lights behind you that may limit their ability to see your lips.
- When addressing a person with a hearing impairment always speak slowly and clearly. Make sure to look directly at the person when you speak, especially if the person wishes to lip-read. Do not exaggerate lip movements or put your hand over your mouth while speaking.
- Some people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment can speak; others have communication and speech difficulties and may use sign language.
- If a person doesn't understand something you say, re-word it instead of repeating it. Use visual clues to illustrate what you are saying.

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- You may find that writing things down assists your ability to communicate.
 - Ask short, clear questions that require only short answers.
 - If your customer is with an Auslan Sign Language (Auslan) interpreter, position the Auslan interpreter near you and always address your comments directly to your customer rather than to the interpreter.
 - Have a pen and paper on hand to help you communicate with your customers.

Sound:

- Use your normal tone of voice and volume. If possible, move out of the way of background noise.
- Reduce unnecessary background noise – this can interfere with hearing aids and make communication difficult.

Lions Hearing Dogs:

- Never pat or distract a Lion's Hearing Dog or offer it food while it is in its orange harness or coat, it is a working animal under the control of its owner.

For people who have a vision impairment or are blind:

Using names and conversations:

- Always identify yourself by name. If appropriate, ask for their name so you can address them directly and so that they know you are talking to them and not to someone else. Speak in normal tones and identify yourself and others in your group. For example: "I am ... and on my right is Andrew". Also, identify each person you speak with by name in the conversation.
- Feel confident to use words such as "look" and "see" as they are a normal part of everyday conversation.

Giving assistance:

- If a customer with a vision impairment asks for assistance to go somewhere ask which side you should be on and offer your arm so they can hold just above your elbow.
 - If offering to help a person, wait for their response and listen carefully to any instructions.
 - Be specific with verbal directions; direct the person who has a vision impairment to THEIR left or right, not yours.
 - Walk alongside and slightly ahead of the person; allow them to take your arm if they need assistance.
 - Always give the person a choice when using escalators, lifts or stairs. Assist them by guiding his or her hand on the railing.
 - When seating people with a vision impairment put their hand on the back of the chair and they
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will then be able to seat themselves.

- When leaving a person with a vision impairment, consult with the individual to ensure that they are orientated to their surroundings.
- Always tell the person with a vision impairment if you have moved objects or furniture.
- Close or open doors fully and avoid revolving doors.

Guide dogs and Seeing Eye Dogs:

- Never pat or distract a guide dog/seeing eye dog or offer it food while it is in harness, it is a working animal under the control of its owner.

Written information - making it easy for people to read

When possible, information that is provided to your customer such as menus or price lists should be available in a variety of formats. Providing information in plain English – that is, in normal, everyday straightforward language using short sentences free from ‘jargon’ and ‘slang’ – will benefit **all** your customers.

These guidelines will assist in producing information with increased accessibility for people with disabilities or other access issues. They will also aid individuals who experience a mild vision impairment or perhaps just left their glasses at home and people with limited English skills.

- Text size to be no less than 12 point, **preferably 18 point**,
- Even spacing between words,
- Text aligned to left – not justified or centred,
- Line spacing to be at least 1.5,
- Separate paragraphs with an extra line space,
- Font needs to be of clearly defined, easily readable letters with adequate spacing. Use Sans Serif style fonts such as Verdana, Arial and Helvetica,
- Contrast between text colour and background colour are important. Avoid patterns or pictures in background,
- Avoid using CONTINUED CAPITALISATION, *italics*, or underline. To highlight a word, change font or use **bold**,
- Provide pictures and symbols to support written text whenever possible, but avoid pictures just for decoration as they may confuse,
- Be consistent with formatting throughout documents,
- Use matt or low sheen paper, as gloss can cause glare.

Where possible it is advisable to have important information available in alternate formats:

Ideal

Not Ideal

- Audio – have staff read information to customers.
- Braille – textured font for people with visual impairment.
- Electronic – Email, Website, CD, DVD or available via USB. This format allows people who have access to computers to transform the information into their preferred format. When providing electronic information, remove formatting (such as bold) and pictures as this may interfere with some software.

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Go to www.dss.gov.au or www.dhhs.vic.gov.au for more information

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The welcoming business program has been developed and endorsed by these organisations:

