

*"There is no greater disability in society, then the inability to see a person as more."*

**Robert M. Hensel**

People should never be treated based on the way they appear, and this is especially true for those with disabilities.

Be an example in your community and realize that people with disabilities are no different from anyone else. Be smart enough to remember that there are alternative ways to communicate, if you are having difficulty understanding the speaker.



### OTHER SUGGESTIONS

If you are understanding most of what the person with the disability is saying except for a word or two, ask them to spell out the word or write it down. The word(s) that you are not understanding may be important to the conversation - try to find another way to figure out the word.

You can offer assistance to someone with a disability, such as to open a door, put something away for them, etc., however do not do so without asking and getting their approval first. Oftentimes the person may look like they are struggling or unable to do the task, when, in fact, they are able to do so, with just some extra effort on their part.

## PROJECT AIR

Project AIR's mission is "to educate communities in the appropriate treatment and accommodation of individuals with speech impairments and more severe disabilities."

**Acceptance** represents the need for individuals with speech impairments and/or more severe disabilities to be accepted by society as the competent persons they are.

**Interaction** consists of not only being accepting of a person, the competency of the person should never be assumed unfairly, simply on the manner that their disability forces them to appear.

**Respect** is what every person wants and deserves. Individuals with more severe disabilities and speech impairments do not always get the respect they deserve. Perhaps having a competent mind in a not so perfect body is difficult to believe.

### Project AIR



Acceptance Interaction  
Respect

*For copies of this pamphlet or  
to schedule a presentation,  
please contact us at  
[KathleenBarajas@project-air.net](mailto:KathleenBarajas@project-air.net)*

*The Acceptance, Interaction,  
and Respect Series*

## ARE YOU LISTENING?

**Interacting With Someone  
With A Disability**



Created by

**Project AIR**

A 501(c)(3) Organization  
[project-air.net](http://project-air.net)

Copyright © 2022

Have you ever been in a situation where you were not understood or even ignored based on the way you look or speak? This is exactly what individuals with disabilities go through on an all too regular basis. Such individuals are oftentimes treated and addressed inappropriately, simply because they walk, talk, move, or appear differently than everyone else.

Much of society is quick to assume that these individuals have an intellectual disability, in addition to their physical disability, and could never be capable of the task which they are attempting. Something as simple as ordering food at McDonald's can be challenging if the person with the disability has a speech impairment and cannot be understood easily.

Individuals with disabilities, especially those that are more severe, should **never** be judged by their appearance. The old adage to 'never judge a book by its cover' fits perfectly here. Obviously, no one can control how their disability affects their movements or appearance, thus why are they being judged immediately and unfairly?

It may surprise you to know that many individuals with more severe disabilities are extremely intelligent and educated, much more than the average person. Being treated as incompetent or as a child is very demeaning and frustrating to these individuals; many times, this is the greatest obstacle about their disability that they face.

If you have never interacted with someone with a disability, it can probably seem intimidating. First and foremost, individuals with disabilities are no different from anyone else! They may move and speak differently than you, but this does not mean that they cannot have a meaningful conversation or conduct their business at hand, just as everyone does.

## COMMUNICATING WITH SOMEONE WITH A SPEECH IMPAIRMENT

When interacting with someone with a significant speech impairment, it is wrong to immediately assume that you cannot understand when you first hear them speak. Many times, the person can be understood, if you take the time to carefully listen to what they are trying to tell you.

**Never hesitate to ask the person to repeat themselves**, even if they need to repeat themselves a few times. A person with such a speech impairment does not mind repeating themselves, if they feel that you are trying to understand.

**Both parties of the conversation/interaction have a duty to one another:** the person with the speech impairment needs to speak as clearly as they can and/or use an alternative mode of communication, while the other person needs to be patient and try their best to understand. An individual with a speech impairment certainly understands that they can be difficult to understand if one is not familiar with their speech pattern.

**Do not assume that the person does not understand you**, simply because they are not responding in a way you might expect. Oftentimes they cannot fully control their arms and/or legs, and their limbs may move uncontrollably as they make every effort to respond to you.

**Never assume that the person cannot hear**, simply because their speech is affected. You are the one who are not understanding them, thus speaking louder is not the solution and can be insulting to the other person.

## ALTERNATE METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

There are numerous ways to communicate, if a person cannot be understood or not speak at all. Do not simply give up, assuming that the interaction cannot occur.

- Ask the person if they have a communication device (which speaks for them) or if they can type out on their cellphone what they are trying to say.
- If they do not have such a device, ask them if they can write down what they are asking for. Some individuals may have a request written down.
- The person may have an alphabet or message board, in which they point to spell out what they are wanting to tell you. Patience is important here, along with giving your undivided attention to what the individual with the disability is trying to tell you.
- Should there be another person (revoicer) repeating what the person with the disability is trying to say, continue to speak to the person with the disability, not the revoicer. The revoicer is the go between; the conversation is between you and the person with the disability, not between you and the third person.