



Communicating with customers with disability

Promoting business accessibility just makes good business sense!

Failing to provide accessible premises and services could mean some customers avoid your business or they make a complaint of discrimination to the Human Rights Commission. You could also put your business's reputation at risk because of poor customer reviews.

Some forms of disability can affect people's ability to communicate. You may need to make adjustments when communicating with people with disabilities, especially a disability that might affect muscle control or mobility.

Depending on the level of disability, a person's communication may involve more than simply hearing and speaking – it might involve a range of ways to communicate such as using signs, Auslan interpreters or communication aids.

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Below are some quick tips that can assist you or your staff when communicating with a customer with disability:

- ✔ Shake hands even if the person has limited hand use or wears an artificial limb. A left hand shake is acceptable. If the person cannot shake hands, acknowledge them with a smile and a spoken greeting.
- ✔ Be patient and give your undivided attention, especially with someone who speaks slowly or with great effort. Don't attempt to speak for or finish a person's sentence.
- ✘ Don't patronise or speak down to people with disability. Treat adults as adults.
- ✔ If the individual requests, offer a person with vision impairment your elbow to guide them rather than grabbing their hand and propelling them.
- ✘ Avoid terms that imply that people with disability are overly courageous, brave, special or superhuman because of having to live with their disability.
- ✘ Avoid asking personal questions about disability. Don't ask "what happened to you?"
- ✔ Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with particular disability to do or say something
- ✔ Be polite and patient when offering assistance. Wait until your offer is accepted. Listen or ask for specific instructions. Be prepared to have your offer refused.
- ✔ Look and speak directly with the person with disability, rather than the people accompanying them.
- ✘ Never pretend to understand what a person is saying if you don't. Ask the person to repeat or rephrase it, or offer them a pen and paper.
- ✔ Use a normal tone of voice to welcome a person with disability. Do not raise your voice unless you are asked to.

Below are some general principles that can assist you or your staff:



People with disability just want to be able to be a part of their community and access goods, products and services like everyone else has the right to.

To find out how you can encourage inclusion and diversity in your business, contact Sean Willenberg on 02 9458 7928 or at sean.willenberg@nswbc.com.au

Information in this sheet has been provided by Job Access and accessible business.
More information can be found at www.jobaccess.gov.au and www.togetherwerock.com