

Tips on Helping a Person with a Disability

The following suggestions have been adapted from Emergency Management Ontario's *Emergency Preparedness Guide for People with Disabilities / Special Needs* and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's *Planning for safety: Evacuating people who need assistance in an emergency*.

In general

- ✓ Ask first if you can be of any assistance. Don't just assume that he or she needs help.
- ✓ Allow the person to describe what help they need from you.
- ✓ Do not touch the person, their service animal and/or their assistive device/equipment without permission.
- ✓ Be patient, listen actively.
- ✓ If the person appears anxious or agitated, speak calmly and provide assurance that you are there to help.
- ✓ Follow instructions posted on special needs equipment and/or assistive device during an emergency.
- ✓ Avoid attempts to lift, support or assist in moving someone unless you are familiar with safe techniques.
- ✓ When communicating, repeat instructions if needed.
- ✗ Do not let the person be separated from his or her wheelchair or mobility aids.

In addition to these tips, consider the following.

For people who are vision impaired

- ✓ Speak clearly and naturally.
- ✓ To guide the person, offer your arm and walk at their pace. Keep half a step ahead.
- ✗ Do not assume the person cannot see you.
- ✗ Never grab or touch a person with vision loss.
- ✓ If the person has a service dog, ask where you should walk to avoid distracting the animal.
- ✗ Do not touch, make eye contact or distract the person's service dog as this can seriously endanger the owner.
- ✓ Provide advance warning of upcoming stairs, curbs, major obstacles, or changes in direction.
- ✓ Watch for overhangs or protrusions the person could walk into.
- ✗ Do not shout at a person with vision loss. Speak clearly and provide specific and precise directions.
- ✗ Avoid the term "over there." Instead, describe locating positions such as, "to your right/left/straight ahead/behind you," or by relaying clock face positions. (For example: 12 o'clock.)

For people who are hearing impaired

- ✓ Get the person's attention via a visual cue or a gentle touch on their arm before speaking to them.
- ✓ Face the person and make eye contact when speaking to them as they may rely on speech reading.
- ✓ Communicate in close proximity.
- ✓ Use gestures to help explain the meaning of what you are trying to communicate.
- ✓ Write a message if there is time and keep a pencil and paper handy.
- ✗ Avoid approaching the person from behind.
- ✗ Don't shout or speak unnaturally slowly.
- ✗ Do not make loud noises as hearing aids amplify sounds and can create a physical shock to the user.