

Accessibility in Action

October 23, 2007

Tip #18: Working with Individuals with Speech Impairments

Limitations in speech and language may result from a number of different impairments and disorders. An individual may be limited due to problems with articulation, voice strength, language expression, or may be non-vocal.

Additionally, speech and language limitations might occur due to stroke, cerebral palsy, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Huntington's Disease, oral and laryngeal paralysis, and vocal cord paralysis.

Communicating with Individuals with Speech Impairments:

- Concentrate on the content of the conversation and what the individual is saying, not the delivery.
- If you do not understand something the individual says, do not pretend that you do. Ask the individual to repeat what he or she said and then repeat it back.
- Be patient. Take as much time as necessary.

- Do not speak for the individual or attempt to finish his or her sentences.
- If you are having difficulty understanding the individual, consider writing as an alternative means of communicating, but first ask the individual if this is acceptable.

Accommodations for People with Speech Impairments:

- Provide pen and paper, chalk or dry-erase boards.
- Allow the use of a computer with word processing software, word prediction software, and/or speech output software.
- Allow the use of e-mail or instant messaging.
- Provide a TTY. TTYs are traditionally used for text telephone communication for individuals who have no speech or speech that is difficult to understand. They can also be useful to communicate one-on-one through a TTY trainer device that connects TTYs together without a telephone line.
- Provide telephone equipment that offers outgoing speech amplification.

Remember:

- Relax.
- Treat the individual with dignity, respect and courtesy.
- Listen to the individual.
- Offer assistance but do not insist or be offended if your offer is not accepted.

ACTION

- Review the suggestions in this tip with staff, volunteers, CSOs and partners (VSPs).
- Apply the suggestions in this tip to the appropriate situations.