

People with developmental disabilities may need your assistance to ensure that their rights are protected. The following tips are offered for simplifying communication:

- Speak directly to the person. Make eye contact before you speak and say her/his name often.
- Keep sentences short.
- Use simple language (e.g. “A lot of feelings” instead of “overwhelmed”); speak slowly and clearly.
- Clearly identify yourself, explain why you are there.
- Ask for concrete descriptions (colors, clothing, etc.).
- Break complicated instructions or information into smaller parts.
- Use pictures, symbols or actions, if needed, to help convey meaning.
- Be patient and take time giving or asking for information.
- Ask “who,” “what” or “where” questions. “When” or “how” questions may be more difficult to answer. Avoid confusing questions about time, sequences, or reasons for behavior.
- Repeat questions more than once if necessary. If the person does not seem to understand, ask it in a different way.
- Do not ask leading questions or questions phrased in a way to solicit a certain answer.
- Phrase questions open-ended when possible (e.g., “Tell me what happened”).
- Treat adults as adults, regardless of their disabilities.
- If you are unsure if the person really understands what you are saying, ask her or him to repeat it in their own words.
- Be sensitive to guilt, self-blame and fear.
- Pay attention to affect (feeling), non-verbal cues, over compliance, resistance and body language.
- Be present. Listen with all your senses. Being fully with the person will help build rapport and let them know you really want to listen. As you show them you are caring and want to understand, they will be more likely to open up to you.

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