

PRACTICAL COMMUNICATION TIPS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT AND EMERGENCY RESPONDERS WHEN INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with all types of disabilities may face barriers during emergencies—whether it's a traffic stop, a 911 call, or an evacuation. Clear and respectful communication is key. No matter the situation, here are some practical tips to help you communicate more effectively with disabled individuals and support their safety.

General Tips for All Disabilities



1. Speak directly to the person, not to a caregiver, interpreter, or companion.
2. Be patient and allow extra time for responses.
3. Use plain language and avoid jargon or complex legal terms.
4. Ask before helping: "Would you like assistance?" Respect the answer.
5. Stay calm, speak clearly and slowly, especially in high-stress situations.



People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

1. Use gestures, writing, or texting to communicate if no interpreter is present.
2. Make sure the person can see your face (avoid covering your mouth).
3. Do not shout — it may be seen as aggressive and won't help.
4. Ask if they need a qualified sign language interpreter.



People who are Blind or have Low Vision

1. Clearly identify yourself.
2. Offer to guide the person; let them take your elbow rather than pulling them.
3. Describe surroundings or actions: "I'm standing to your left" or "I'm handing you a paper."
4. Do not touch a service animal or mobility device without permission.



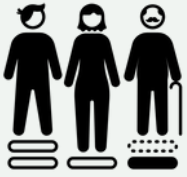
People who have Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)

1. Use short, clear sentences and speak slowly.
2. Allow extra time to respond.
3. Avoid yes/no questions that may confuse; ask open-ended questions.
4. Repeat or rephrase as needed. Be calm and reassuring.



People who have Psychiatric Disabilities

1. Stay calm and non-threatening; avoid sudden movements.
2. Give space and avoid physical contact unless necessary.
3. Use simple, direct instructions one at a time.
4. Offer choices when possible to provide a sense of control.



Bonus Tip: Ask, Don't Assume

1. "Is there a way I can better communicate with or help you?"
2. Asking respectfully shows empathy and helps avoid misunderstandings.



Tips for Clear Communication using Plain Language

Traffic Stop (Verbal Communication)

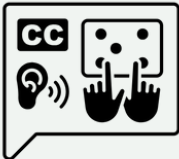
Original:

"License and registration. Do you know why I pulled you over?"

Plain Language:

"Hi, I'm Officer Smith with the City Police. I stopped you because you were driving 45 in a 30 zone. Can I please see your driver's license and registration?"

Why this works: Clear introduction, respectful tone, explains the reason directly without conflict.



Witness Interview Request

Original:

"You may be contacted to provide a statement regarding the earlier incident."

Plain Language:

"We may ask you to tell us what you saw (day/time of day). If you're willing to help, we'll take your statement."

Why this works: Uses simple verbs ("tell us"), avoids legal jargon ("transpired"), and invites cooperation.