
COMMUNICATING WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

People who are deaf or have a hearing impairment

Hearing impairment is a term that encompasses the fact there are different degrees of hearing loss. Hearing impairment includes full or partial loss of the ability to detect sounds.

Communicating with deaf or hearing impaired passengers:

1. Talk while facing the person – make sure you have their attention, maintain eye contact (some deaf people will be able to lip read)
2. Don't speak too fast – talk at a normal pace, pause from time to time
3. Don't mumble – speak clearly and make sure your face is well lit
4. Don't hide your mouth, chew gum, or eat while speaking
5. Be expressive – hand gestures and facial expressions can help give clues about what you are saying
6. If asked to repeat yourself, try using different words than the first time
7. Don't speak for or answer for a hearing impaired person when talking with others. Give them time to respond.
8. Don't shout – it distorts your words
9. Relax, be patient and have a good sense of humour
10. Ask how else you can help – they may require you to write down what you are saying

If there is any doubts about how to provide assistance ask the person, they can best advise how they prefer to communicate.

Additional information regarding communicating with hearing impaired passengers can be found at www.hearing.com.au.

People who are blind or have low vision

Although many people who are blind or have a hearing impairment can and do find their way around on their own, on occasion, some will require assistance. The following are the ten considerations for assisting a vision impaired person.

1. Identify yourself and offer help first. – a blind person or person with low vision may well be unaware of you as you approach, so say hello before you provide any physical assistance in any way. Ask politely if they require assistance.
2. Offer your arm – if assistance is required, offer your arm to grip just about the elbow. Make sure you are both facing the same direction.
3. Steps and Stairs – as you approach say step up or step down. When you reach level ground take a step forwards, then pause and give the person you are guiding time to complete the last step.
4. Single file – in a busy or crowded space move your arm to the middle of your back, keeping it straight. The person you are guiding will move in behind you, extending their own arm to allow enough distance to walk comfortably.
5. Parting Company – when the journey is over, make sure the vision impaired person knows where they are, the direction in which they are facing and where they should go next.
6. Keep your eyes open – for potential hazards such as bins, baggage or power cords or trip hazards.
7. Don't raise your voice – loss of sight does not necessarily mean loss of hearing.
8. Crowds – take extra care in crowds wherever possible.
9. Highlight mobility aids – Let the person know you are guiding of any possible aid to mobility, such as guide rails, banisters.
10. Never distract a working assistance animal – do not stroke, feed or call a guide dog.

Additional information regarding communicating with vision impaired passengers can be found at www.visionaustralia.org.au