

# Communication

A Person with an Intellectual Disability (ID) may have trouble speaking, hearing or understanding spoken language. Communication difficulties make it harder for them to ask for help and engage in social settings.

## Tips ON HOW TO TALK TO A PERSON WITH SPEECH IMPAIRMENT:

- Tip!** Move from an area with distractions to a quieter area.
- Tip!** Don't pretend to understand what a person with a speech impairment says. Instead, ask them to repeat what they said and then repeat it back.
- Tip!** Ask short questions that require short answers, or a nod of the head.
- Tip!** Take as much time as necessary to communicate and be patient. The person might be processing the information you provided at a slower rate so it may take them longer to respond.
- Tip!** Let the person speak for him or herself and wait for them to finish. Don't attempt to help by finishing the person's sentences.
- Tip!** If the person uses a communication aid, such as a picture board or a voice output device, encourage them to use it to facilitate communication.
- Tip!** After trying to understand the person repeatedly, ask if it is OK to communicate through alternative means such as sign, gestures, or writing it out for example.

**Tip!** Remember that even non-verbal individuals can use facial expressions, and body language to communicate their feelings.



State of New Jersey  
Department of Human Services  
Division of Developmental Disabilities



## ON HOW TO TALK TO A PERSON WITH A HEARING IMPAIRMENT:

**Tip!** Tap the individual on the shoulder if he or she is not facing you before you speak.

**Tip!** Make sure the person has a hearing aid available to them, if applicable.

**Tip!** Look directly at the person and speak clearly in a normal tone of voice.

**Tip!** Try to use short, simple sentences.

**Tip!** Avoid chewing gum or smoking while you talk.

**Tip!** Speak directly to the person and not the sign language interpreter.

**Tip!** Let the phone ring longer than usual if you are calling someone with a hearing impairment.

**Tip!** If you do not have a Text Telephone (TTY), dial 711 to reach the national telecommunications relay service. This service can facilitate the call between you and an individual who uses a TTY.



## REMEMBER:

**Tip!** Treat the individual with dignity, respect, and courtesy.

**Tip!** Be patient. Take your time communicating so that everyone understands each other.

**Tip!** Focus on the “person” and not the “disability.”

**Tip!** Contact a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) to assess your client’s communication abilities and how they can be better communicators in their environment.

