



## To Start

It is important for doctors, nurses, therapists, and other helpers to say the right things to parents with disabilities. Parents should get information about themselves and their children that they can understand. Having that information makes it easier for parents to do the right thing for themselves and their children. People with disabilities CAN learn about the help they are getting. Sometimes you may need to explain it differently.



## Tips and Tricks

Here are some tips that you and your team can use to talk to parents with disabilities in ways they can understand.

- **Use easy-to-understand language. A lot of medical workers use complicated language that's hard to understand.** There are many people who have a hard time with big, confusing words, like people with intellectual disabilities, people who haven't been in school for a long time, some autistic people, and people who don't know English very well. If you are talking to people you

work with, everyone may understand what you are talking about. But that isn't always the case when you are talking to the people you are helping.

- **On the other hand, some parents with disabilities do know medical words.** Some parents may work with other disabled people. Others may have taught themselves about their disabilities so they could talk to their doctors about what they were going through. Use your best judgment. Every disabled person has their own background. Some disabled people who can understand more complicated language might be hurt if you act as though they cannot understand you because of their disability.
- **It is your job as a helper to make sure the people you work with understand you.** Being understood will help your patient or client work effectively with you to manage their condition and raise their children.
- **Be patient when describing conditions, procedures, or recommendations.** Sometimes people with disabilities may need more time to process information. Sometimes people with disabilities don't know the kinds of words that healthcare workers use to talk about disability. Take your time and check that the other person understands what you are talking about before moving on to the next subject.
- **Use accessible materials.** Some people may have low vision, an intellectual disability, dyslexia, or another disability that makes it harder for them to read printed documents. They may also be English-language learners who are still getting used to using the language. Methods to make materials more understandable include
  - **Adding pictures to written text.** There are several websites with photos you can use freely,



like Unsplash. You can also buy pictures designed specifically to communicate with people with disabilities, like the SymbolStix library. If you don't have the time to do this yourself, your organization can possibly work with someone else to make things easier to understand for people.

- **Making large-print documents with low vision who can still read printed documents.**
- **Writing plain-language materials that explain complicated medical or legal information. Use words that talk about real things, not just ideas. Don't use language that people outside your job won't understand.**
- **Using different ways to share your information. For example, you can use sound recordings, or videos with subtitles or captions.** If you can, ensure these videos have captioning available for Deaf/deaf or hard-of-hearing people, or people who struggle to understand what they hear.

of Developmental Primary Care: <http://odpc.ucsf.edu/communications-paper>

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network has a summary of some access needs that people on the autism spectrum may present with: <http://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Autistic-Access-Needs-Notes-on-Accessibility.pdf>

## More Information

The University of California, San Francisco, has a resource on communication supports for people with developmental disabilities through their Office

### How to Cite This Brief

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