

Strategies for Communication Specialists and Journalists to Interview a Person With a Disability

The media have a responsibility to portray individuals with a disability as they are, so that fear associated with disability can be replaced with understanding and knowledge.

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When interviewing a person with a disability, plan ahead, ask the person about any interview considerations and use common sense. The following strategies may be helpful to your efforts.

Setting the Stage for the Interview

- ❑ Keep an open mind and remember that the person you are interviewing is an individual with unique experiences, attributes and ideas.
- ❑ If the person's disability is not necessary to the story, don't focus on it.
- ❑ Be clear about your deadlines and the focus of the story in your initial contact with the interview participant.
- ❑ Consider the needs of the person in determining an interview location.
- ❑ If you are interviewing a person who uses a wheelchair, make sure the interview location is accessible, including entrance, parking and washrooms.
- ❑ Schedule enough time for your interview, taking into account the fact that someone who uses a different means of communication such as a voice output system, Bliss symbols or a communication board requires more time to reply to questions.
- ❑ If a face-to-face or telephone interview is not possible, use written communication, TTY, or email.

Making the Introduction

- ❑ Speak directly to the person, not to any accompanying companion or interpreter. Make sure any companion is made to feel welcome.
- ❑ When interviewing a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and anyone who is accompanying you.
- ❑ Remember that service dogs are working animals. Do not pet or distract them.
- ❑ It is appropriate to shake hands when introduced to a person with a disability. People who have limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb do shake hands. When meeting a person with a visual impairment, ask the question “Would you like to shake hands?” and then offer a handshake if appropriate.

The Interview

- ❑ Facilitate communication by positioning yourself at eye level facing the person. If the person is in a wheelchair, sit in a chair.
- ❑ When you are interviewing a person who is hearing impaired or deaf, it might be necessary to get their attention by tapping them on the shoulder or waving your hands. Remember to look directly at the person and speak clearly and slowly, since some individuals lip-read.
- ❑ When interviewing a person who has a speech difficulty or who is an augmentative communication user, it can be helpful to keep your questions short.
- ❑ Listen attentively and always wait for the person to finish speaking rather than completing their statements. If you don’t understand something said, ask the person to repeat the statement. Like anyone else, people with a disability would rather repeat themselves than be misunderstood or misquoted.
- ❑ Remember to respect the person's personal space. If the person uses a mobility device such as a wheelchair or walker, don’t lean on it.

- ❑ People with disabilities are okay with everyday terms and will not be offended if you say “See you later” or “Let's take a walk,” even if they are visually impaired or use a wheelchair.
- ❑ Be yourself. Relax and speak in your normal voice. Try to have fun with the interview.
- ❑ If you are not sure of what to do, just ask.



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