

Accessible Customer Service for Emergency Responders

An Emergency Management Ontario E-Learning Utility

Tips for Interacting with People with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

Communication

- Break down information into simple steps.
- Use simple signals or symbols.
- Do not talk about a person to others in front of him or her.
- Provide pictures, symbols, or diagrams instead of words. Point to your ID picture as you say who you are and point to any protective equipment as you speak about it.
- Read written information.
- Visual perception of written instructions or signs may be confusing.
- Ability to understand speech is often more developed than his or her own vocabulary.
- The individual should be treated as an adult.
- Communicate what will happen (simply and concretely), when events will happen (tie to common events in addition to numbers and time, for example, “By lunch time...” “By the time the sun goes down...”), how long this situation will last and when things will return to normal (if you know), when the person can contact or rejoin loved ones (for example, calls to family, re-uniting with pets).
- Some people use pictures and/or other communications devices. For example, a communication board.
- Provide frequent updates on what’s happening and what will happen next.
- Explain public address system announcements in simple language.

Behaviour

- Sense of direction may be limited, requiring someone to accompany them.

Environment/Surroundings

- Reduce distractions (For example, lower volume of radio, turn off flashing lights).