

by Christine Holland, M.S., BCBA, LBA

As a service provider for individuals with development disabilities we are sometimes asked by businesses and community organizations outside the field how they can be more inclusive of individuals with developmental disabilities. While there are many things they can do, we have compiled 5 basic tips to keep in mind when interacting with individuals with developmental disabilities

## *Five tips for interacting with people who have a disability*

1

### **Follow the Golden Rule**

People with developmental disabilities are, first and foremost, people! You can never go wrong treating people like you want to be treated.

2

### **Always ask before you help**

Just because a person has a developmental disability, it doesn't necessarily mean they need help. Adults with disabilities want to be treated like adults. In addition, if a child with a developmental disability appears to be having a difficult moment, it is important to check in with that individual caregiver before trying to help. The presence of another person may actually escalate the situation.

3

### **Communicate clearly**

When you communicate with someone with a developmental disability, you want to say exactly what you mean. Avoid using sarcasm and slang expressions that may be confusing like, "It's raining cats and dogs". Be direct and to the point. In addition, you may need to repeat questions or directions.

4

### **Talk directly to the person instead of their caregivers**

Speak directly to the person instead of their caregivers or companions. It is important not to make assumptions about the person's ability to communicate or to understand what is said to them.

5

### **Be patient!**

Sometimes individuals with developmental disabilities need time to express themselves and to respond to questions and directions. When you ask a question, be sure to give the person time to respond. If someone is trying to tell you something, they may need extra time to finish their thought. In addition, some individuals may use assistive technology to communicate, which may take longer than vocal speech.

For more resources, check out our Best Practice Blog at  
[www.autismva.org/bestpractice](http://www.autismva.org/bestpractice)