

Working with Deaf and Disabled Clients

General Tips

- Treat the person like any other – speak to them, not their supporter/interpreter
- Ask about accessibility needs ahead of time
- Be aware of the time/money cost for disabled people to travel to venues
- Consider the accessibility of your office/venue
- Remember that all disabled people are different – if you are uncertain, ask!

Tips for Specific Disabilities

Blind/Low Vision

- Advice on guiding others:
<https://blindlowvision.org.nz/resources/guiding-others/>
- Advice on accessible documents and presentations:
<https://blindlowvision.org.nz/resources/accessibility-guidelines/>

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

- If an NZSL interpreter is present, they and the Deaf person can guide you on how best to work with them
- Interpreters can be booked through iSign: <https://isign.co.nz/>
- NZ Relay can be used for phone and video calls: <https://www.nzrelay.co.nz/index>
- People who have NZSL as their first language may not read and write English fluently

Communication Disorders

- An inability to speak clearly is not a sign of diminished intelligence or capacity
- Give the person time to respond
- Alternative ways of signalling intention (e.g., writing, pointing)
- Assistive technology (e.g., AAC, text-to-speech)

Mobility Impairment

- Plan in advance as special transport may be needed
- Environment: consider both access (e.g., steps, slopes) and room to move (e.g., doorway widths, turning circles)
- Signatures – may need assistance or an alternative to signing documents

Neurodivergence, Cognition and Mental Health

- Sensory sensitivity – ask whether any environmental changes are needed (e.g., different room, lights dimmed)
- Memory issues – put information in writing, use checklists
- Executive functioning – extra processing time, visual supports
- Assistance with reading – Easy Read may help (<https://www.peoplefirst.org.nz/easy-read-library>)
- Check understanding
- Body language differences – don't judge

Capacity

- Everyone is presumed to have capacity until proven otherwise.

- Checking Capacity

- Ask the person to explain the matter to you in their own words
- Ask open questions
- Avoid questions like 'what is today's date?' or 'who is the prime minister?'
- Consider asking for privacy if a support person is present

- Who can act on someone else's behalf?

- Parents can act on behalf of children under 18
- Once someone turns 18, others cannot act on their behalf unless an EPA or Order under the PPPR Act empowers them to do so
- Make sure you are speaking to the right person – someone might have different attorneys for personal care and property, for example

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