



Communicating with Children who have Special Needs

In describing a child with special needs, be sure to put the child before the disability. For example say “a child with a learning disability” instead of a “learning-disabled child.”

Children with Intellectual Challenges

- Address children using simple but not childish words.
- State your request clearly and precisely.
- Stay calm and be ready to rephrase your request several ways.
- Use concrete examples frequently.
- To confirm a child has understood your message, discreetly request that he¹ repeat it.

Children with Visual Challenges

- Speak and act in your usual way. Avoid using terms that imply sight, such as “Watch, I’ll show you how to do it.”
- Avoid using references to “here” and “there.” These words are not useful references for the child who cannot see.
- Respond verbally to questions. Head movements and hand gestures will not be noticed. Make your words precise and, before you use a figurative phrase, ensure that the child will understand its meaning in its context.
- Do not increase the volume of your voice (unless you know from medical records that this will help with an auditory concern). Avoid long pauses in your speech.
- Provide the child with an orderly routine. Avoid doing things for the child, even if it takes him longer than other children.



- Always let the child know where you are: tell him where you are in relation to him and let him know when you are leaving.

Children with Auditory Challenges

- Speak clearly using your normal speed and tone, articulating carefully but without exaggeration.
- Make sure you have the child’s attention before you speak. Use all manner of gestures, facial expressions, actions and pictures to help the child understand language and gradually acquire it.
- Check frequently to make sure the child has understood. If he has not, rephrase your message, rather than merely saying it again.
- Hearing loss can cause delays in language development and difficulties with speech. You may have trouble understanding the

- child who has been deaf since birth. Don’t hesitate to ask him to repeat himself. Your interest and encouragement will be motivators for future success.
- Rather than speaking for the child, give him many opportunities to express himself.
- To avoid prejudice, openly discuss his auditory challenge with his playmates and let them learn about his hearing aid.
- Make sure other children speak to the child calmly, clearly and one at a time.

Children with Physical Challenges

- Encourage children to express their own ideas and feelings.
- Encourage children to learn appropriate behaviours for the setting.
- Speak with the child about his physical challenge. Encourage him to explain to the other children how he deals with his disability and what his plans are for the future.
- As much as you can, let the child take care of himself.
- Allow the child’s input into decisions that affect him, whenever possible.
- Discuss with all the children physical challenges in general. This way the child will not feel alone.
- Encourage children to come up with their own adaptations so they can make best use of the materials and resources.
- Help children concentrate their efforts on realistic, doable outcomes and channel their energies towards activities they have chosen as goals and priorities.

1. The masculine pronouns “he”, “him” and “his” are used for simplicity and are intended to also represent “she”, “her” and “hers”.