

EVERY VICTIM MATTERS

Best practices in supporting victims with disabilities

When victims with disabilities request accommodations, it is important to reasonably support those requests.
The Americans with Disabilities Act means that including people with disabilities is not only a good business practice, but it is the law!



Ensuring equal opportunity and access for victims with disabilities

1. VICTIMS WITH DISABILITIES

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines disability as a medical condition or disorder that substantially limits a person in doing basic activities. People with disabilities are 3 times more likely to be a victim of a crime. Many of these victims will need ADA-supported accommodations to access victim services.

2. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND ACCESS

The ADA prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life open to the general public, including victim services and shelters. Facilities must offer equal access and treatment, effective communication, and removal of existing barriers.

3. ACCOMMODATE UPON REQUEST

While the ADA does not specifically name all impairments that are covered, it is almost always against the law to question a victim about his/her disability.



Interacting with a victim who has a developmental disability (DD)

1. DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

DDs are a group of conditions due to physical, learning, language, or behavior impairments. Autism, intellectual disabilities, and cerebral palsy are some types of developmental disabilities.

2. BE CALM, LITERAL AND CONCRETE

Communication challenges are common when working with victims with DDs. Maintain an even tone of speech. Avoid using metaphors. Recognize echolalia (repeating what was heard) may occur.

3. EXPECT TO TAKE MORE TIME

Victims with DDs must be given time to respond and understand. They may process language more slowly; once they have understood a question, they may be slower to think through their answer. If needed, rephrase the question. Check for mutual understanding routinely. If victim responses are in 2 or 3 word sentences, communicate in short sentences, too.



Interacting with a victim who uses a service animal

1. SERVICE ANIMALS ARE NOT PETS

Service animals are trained to do tasks for people with disabilities, such as guiding a person who is blind, picking up dropped items, or alerting a person who is deaf.

2. SERVICE ANIMALS ARE AN ACCOMMODATION

Victim services' providers must allow victims with disabilities to bring their service animals into all areas where victims are normally allowed to go.

3. IS THIS A SERVICE ANIMAL?

Victim services' providers may ask if this is a service animal or what tasks the animal has been trained to do, but cannot require special ID cards for the animal or ask about the victim's disability.

4. UNCONTROLLED SERVICE ANIMAL

You may ask the owner to remove a service animal if the animal is not under control. Do not touch the service animal without permission.



Interacting with a victim who is deaf or hard of hearing

1. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Victim services' providers must provide effective means of communicating with clients who are deaf or hard of hearing. Writing notes or pointing is okay for brief exchanges. Complex and interactive communications may require a qualified sign language interpreter or other accommodations.

2. SPEAK DIRECTLY

Make sure to get the victim's attention, such as by a tap on the shoulder or slowly flickering the lights. Maintain eye contact, even if the person uses a sign language interpreter. Talk directly to the person ('What would you like?') rather than to the interpreter ('Ask her what she'd like.').

3. SPEAK CLEARLY IN A NORMAL TONE

Many people who have hearing loss watch people's lips as they speak to assist them in understanding. Avoid chewing gum or obscuring your mouth while speaking.



Interacting with a victim who is blind

1. IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND SPEAK DIRECTLY

Treat a victim who is blind as you would any other victim. Address him/her directly. Share your name and your role.

2. OFFER SUPPORT AND WAIT FOR DIRECTION

Many people who are blind do not need support. Ask what support is needed.

3. DESCRIBE SETTINGS AND OBSTACLES

If mobility support is needed, offer your arm and let the individual hold it. Walk naturally. Describe the setting, noting obstacles, such as stairs ('up' or 'down'). If you give a warning, be specific.

4. ASK BEFORE TOUCHING GUIDE DOG OR CANE

If the person has a guide dog, respect that the dog is working. A cane is part of the personal space of the individual who is blind. Don't touch or move it without asking.



Interacting with a victim who uses a wheelchair

1. ASK BEFORE YOU ACT

People who use wheelchairs have different disabilities and varying abilities. If you believe a victim with a disability needs assistance, ask before you act.

2. ASK BEFORE YOU TOUCH

People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space and an extension of their bodies; ask before touching.

3. LANGUAGE MATTERS

Say "person who uses a wheelchair" rather than "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair bound." The wheelchair is what allows the victim to get around and participate in society.

4. SPEAK DIRECTLY

Speak directly to the victim in a wheelchair, not to his/her companion or aide. If you have trouble understanding, ask the person in the wheelchair to repeat or for ways to improve communication.

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