

Positive Steps for Ensuring an Inclusive Workplace for Employees with Disabilities

The federal public service workplace thrives on communication – presenting, explaining, listening, brainstorming and discussing. The following tips will assist everyone in communicating effectively.

- Give employees with a disability time to do or say things at their pace.
- Focus on abilities and adapt your communication skills to the individual's needs.
- Ask what assistance, if any, the employee would like; then offer it. Respect the individual's choice to be independent.
- An expression like "see you later" is acceptable to someone who is blind, and "did you hear about that?" will not bother someone who is deaf/hearing impaired.
- Speak directly to the person, even if an attendant is present.
- Ask someone with a severe speech impediment to repeat or spell out key words if you do not understand what is said.

All employees should be able to participate and contribute to the progress of the work team. Environmental settings and accessibility are important. Dark or noisy places make it difficult for people with visual, speech or hearing disabilities to participate in a conversation. Adapt settings and use alternative format methods of delivering information.

The following are some ways you can meet the needs of employees with specific disabilities.

Blind or visually impaired employees

- Identify yourself and anyone else with you.
- If offering to act as a guide, ask the person to take your arm just above the elbow and walk about a half a step ahead of the person. Then listen or ask for instructions.
- If appropriate, offer to read written information.
- Plan ahead to allow adequate time to prepare printed material in alternate form (e.g. Braille, large print, audiocassette or diskette).

Deaf or hard-of-hearing employees

- If securing the services of a sign language interpreter, specify the official language (English or French) required. Ensure that bilingual requirements are met where necessary.
- Speak clearly and at a pace that allows the sign language interpreter to interpret for the person who is deaf and to allow him or her to respond through the interpreter.
- Reduce or eliminate disruptive background noises (e.g. tapping pens or shuffling paper), since amplification devices are very sensitive to ambient noise.
- Converse in a quiet environment, or move to one, in order to facilitate communication.