

Tips on Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities

When interviewing any disabled applicant:

- Always offer to shake hands. Do not avoid eye contact, but don't stare either.
- Treat the applicant as you would any other adult--don't be patronizing. If you don't usually address applicants by their first names, don't make an exception for applicants with disabilities.
- If you feel it appropriate, offer the applicant assistance (for example, if an individual with poor grasping ability has trouble opening a door), but don't assume it will necessarily be accepted. Don't automatically give assistance without asking first.
- If you know in advance that an applicant has a particular disability, try to get some information (from local and/or national organizations) before the interview on how the limitations of the disability may affect the performance of the essential functions of the job in question.
- Whenever possible, let the applicant visit the actual work station.

When interviewing an applicant who uses a wheelchair:

- Don't lean on the wheelchair.
- Make sure you get on the same eye level with the applicant if the conversation lasts more than a couple of minutes.
- Keep accessibility in mind. (Is that chair in the middle of your office a barrier to a wheelchair user? If so, move it aside.)
- Don't be embarrassed to use such phrases as "Let's walk over to the plant."

When interviewing an applicant who is mentally retarded:

- Use simple language but don't resort to "baby talk."
- When giving directions or instructions, proceed slowly.
- Limit the number of directions.
- Ask the applicant to summarize the information you have given to make sure it was understood.
- Give positive feedback whenever possible and appropriate.

When interviewing an applicant who is blind:

- Identify yourself and others present immediately; cue a handshake verbally or physically.
- Use verbal cues; be descriptive in giving directions. (The table is about five steps to your left.)
- Verbalize chair location, or place the person’s hand on the back of the chair, but do not place the person on the chair.
- Don’t be embarrassed to use phrases like “Do you see what I mean?”
- Don’t shout.
- Keep doors either open or closed; a half-opened door is a serious hazard.
- Offer assistance in travel; let the applicant grasp your left arm, usually just above the elbow.
- Do not touch an applicant’s cane. Do not touch a guide dog when it is in harness. In fact, resist the temptation to pet a guide dog.

When interviewing an applicant who is deaf:

- You may need to use a physical sign to get the applicant’s attention.
- If the applicant is lip reading, enunciate clearly, keep your mouth clear of obstruction, and place yourself where there is ample lighting. Keep in mind that an accomplished lip reader will be able to clearly understand 30 to 35 percent of what you say.
- The best method to communicate is to use a combination of gestures, facial expressions, and note passing. You may also want to learn how to finger spell, or if you’re more ambitious, take a course in American Sign Language.
- Don’t shout.
- If you don’t understand what the applicant is telling you, don’t pretend you did. Ask the candidate to repeat the sentence(s).
- If necessary, use a sign language interpreter. But keep in mind that the interpreter’s job is to translate, not to get involved in the interview in any other way. Therefore, always talk directly to the applicant. Don’t say to the interpreter, “Tell her that...”