

Interpreters relay information and should not be included in the conversation.

When speaking to a person who lip-reads or is hard of hearing, speak clearly! Do not shout or exaggerate your speech.

Good lighting is important to facilitate clear communication.

## People with Speech Disabilities

**Give the person** your full attention. Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences. Listen patiently and carefully.

Do not assume that a person with a speech impairment doesn't understand you.

If you have trouble understanding, ask the person to repeat themselves. If, after trying, you still cannot understand, ask them to write it down or to suggest another way of facilitating communication.

If necessary, repeat your understanding of the message in order to clarify or confirm what the person said.

A quiet environment makes communication easier.

## People with Hidden Disabilities

Not all disabilities are apparent. A person may make a request or respond in a way that is unfamiliar to you because of a non-visible disability. The person may disclose a disability and need an accommodation or other support to fully participate.

Because of the stigma associated with certain disabilities, people may be reluctant to disclose their disability or ask for an accommodation. If someone looks appears not to understand you, ask in a respectful way if there is an alternative method for facilitating communication.

Don't make assumptions about the person or the disability.

*This brochure, and its complement, [Using Person First Language](#), are resource guides for court personnel when interacting with people with disabilities.*

### Georgia Committee on Access and Fairness in the Courts

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# Interacting With Persons With Disabilities



## Georgia Committee on Access and Fairness in the Courts

## Administrative Office of the Courts

## General Considerations

First and foremost, *treat people with disabilities with the same courtesy, dignity and respect that you afford everyone else.* All of the practical pointers contained within this brochure are based on this guiding principle.

Always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to their companion, assistant or sign language interpreter. Speak in your normal tone and do not raise your voice unless requested. If the person doesn't understand you, try again. Don't become anxious if you have to make repeated attempts at listening or speaking to ensure effective communication.

Don't assume that a person with a disability needs help. If someone looks as though they may need assistance, it is okay to ask. Always ask before offering help. If your offer to assist is accepted, listen or ask for instructions before you act. Generally, assistance with doors is much appreciated, so long as you are clear of the path of travel. Don't let it bother you if someone refuses your offer to assist - people with disabilities know best what they can or cannot do.

Familiarize yourself with the court's accessibility features and accommodation protocol. When a person with a disability asks for an accommodation, it is not a complaint. Rather, they are asking for what they believe necessary to fully and equally participate in that particular court activity, service or program. Respond courteously to all accommodation requests, and make sure to promptly direct the request to appropriate personnel.

## People Who Have Mobility Impairments



Do not touch or lean on a person's wheelchair, scooter or walking aid without permission. People with disabilities consider their equipment as part of their personal space.

Be aware of an individual's reach limits.

When speaking with a wheelchair user for more than a few moments, sit down and/or position yourself at the same eye contact level. Also, provide a chair for someone who has difficulty standing for an extended time.

People who are not visibly mobility-impaired may have needs related to their mobility. For example, a person with a respiratory or heart condition may have trouble walking long distances or walking quickly.

## People Who Are Blind or Have Visual Impairments



Identify yourself and address the individual by name so the person will know you are speaking to them.

It is okay to ask, "Would you like me to guide you?" If your offer is accepted, let the person take your arm just above the elbow.

If the individual has a guide dog, walk on the side opposite the dog. As you are walking, describe the setting, noting any obstacles, such as stairs ("up" or "down") and objects protruding from the wall at head level.

Never pet a guide dog (or any other service animal) before asking its handler. The dog is working and needs to concentrate.

If you need to leave a person alone, inform the person first and make sure there is a rail, wall or something else s/he can touch.

Don't touch a person's cane - it is part of the individual's personal space. If the person puts the cane down, don't move it. Let them know if it's in the way.

Offer to read written information.

## People Who Are Deaf or Hearing Impaired



Before speaking to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, make sure that you get their attention. To get a person's attention, call their name. If there is no response, lightly touch their arm or shoulder or flicker the lights.

There are a wide range of hearing losses and communication preferences. If you do not know the individual's preferred communication method, ask.

Make direct eye contact. Natural facial expressions and gestures will provide important information to your conversation.

If you are asked to repeat yourself several times, try rephrasing your sentence.