



Hints for Communicating with people with cognitive disabilities

Try to keep your surroundings quiet and free from distractions.

Make eye contact before you speak and say the person's name often.

Use simple language, repeat points, speak slowly and clearly.

Clearly identify yourself, explain why you are there.

Give one direction, or ask one question at a time.

Have person repeat directions/instructions in their own words.

Ask open-ended rather than "yes/no" type questions.

Be patient for response.

Avoid abstract questions on time/sequences/reasons for behavior.

Observe behavior as nonverbal communication.

Treat an adult as an adult, but be sensitive to their special needs.

Partners in Justice 1-800-662-8706

This project is supported by The Arc of North Carolina and the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities and the funds it receives through P.L. 106-402, the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000.



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Traits Often Seen

May not communicate at age level:

- Limited vocabulary
- Difficulty understanding/answering questions
- Mimic answers/responses
- Unable to communicate events clearly in his/her own words

May not understand consequences of situations:

- Unaware of seriousness of situations
- Easily led or persuaded by others
- Naive eagerness to confess or please

May not behave appropriately:

- Unaware of social norms and appropriate social behavior
- Acts younger than actual age, may display childlike behavior
- Displays low frustration tolerance and/or poor impulse control

May have difficulty performing tasks:

- Inability to read, write, tell time, change money
- Difficulty staying focused and easily distracted
- Awkward/poor motor coordination

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