



SPEECH DISABILITIES

Speech disabilities vary in type and degree and may include difficulty with voice strength, fluency, aphasia (which may alter the articulation of certain words), or voicelessness. Speech impairments may be congenital or due to an injury or illness. At the extreme are people who cannot speak at all and must communicate by sign language or by using a talking computer. Yet, even where the disability does not significantly impair the ability to communicate in an understandable way, people with speech disabilities are often subject to ridicule in public and additional discrimination related to employment.

Causes of speech disabilities include loss of use or removal of vocal chords, physical impairment, (for example a lisp), mental co-ordination disability, (stuttering), lack of mouth/throat co-ordination, deafness or hearing impairment.

Persons with Speech Disabilities In The Workplace

Technology and Adaptive Devices

- Speech amplification tools: These are body-worn personal speech amplifiers designed to increase the volume of a weakened, or esophageal, voice.
- A simple computer: that allows for communication between two individuals can take turns typing to each other.
- Recorded message device. This hand-held device aids in communication for someone who has had a stroke and has a mild to moderate expressive aphasia (difficulty with ability to recall or formulate words) or dysarthria (motor speech problem causing speech to be difficult to understand). A family member or caregiver records the message for the user. The user can press any of the 15 buttons depending on the message he or she wishes to express. Words or pictures can be placed on the buttons to assist in the process.

Interaction Considerations

Interacting requires patience and candor. Ensure you understand what has been said. Repeat what you understand and allow for time to "fill in the blanks". The following is a list of other considerations to keep in mind through your interactions:

- Encourage self-expression, but do not pressure the person to speak.
- Be patient and allow the person to complete what they are saying without interruption. Wait ... do not assist unless you are asked to do so.
- Ask if writing may be easier than speaking.
- Allow the use of assistive devices such as "speaking machines" or computerized synthesizers.
- Anxiety can aggravate a speech disability- do not pressure the person to talk in a group.
- Allow one-to-one communication if necessary.
- Communication boards, symbols, and cards for commonly used words are helpful.



- Consider exchange of non-essential job duties, i.e. answering the telephone with another task.
- A quiet environment makes communication easier; allow periodic rest from speaking.

Accommodations

- Provide speech amplification, speech enhancement, or other communication device .
- Use written communication, such as email or fax.
- Transfer to a position that does not require a lot of communication.

This information was compiled by Open Door Group to assist BC businesses to have successful working relationship with persons with disabilities in our communities.

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