

Disability etiquette

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Disability etiquette

The information provided in this part of the Guide will be helpful when meeting, interviewing and recruiting disabled people.

It is common for false assumptions to be made about disabled people. More thought given to the words and phrases used can influence and change the way people think about, and act towards, disabled people.

People generally want to use language that describes disability accurately and does not cause offence, but are often not sure what would be best. In this section of the Guide, a range of common phrases and courtesies are provided to develop a greater understanding of the views and preferences of disabled people.

As all disabled people are individuals, there are no hard and fast rules regarding etiquette and terminology. These explanations are intended to be helpful, but often the best way to make a disabled person comfortable with you is to ask for their advice.

Terminology

Using inappropriate language can reinforce a negative idea or stereotype about disabled people. When you're working with someone, you can ask what terminology he or she prefers. When you're speaking in public or writing, you'll need to do a little research to ensure that you use widely-accepted terminology and avoid potentially offensive language. There are some guidelines later in this chapter.

The most important thing to know when interacting with disabled people is that they are individuals and, just like all individuals, they are very different, including being different in how they deal with disability issues.

Do not make assumptions about disabled people.

Do not assume you know what someone wants, how they feel, or what is best for them. If you have a question about what to do, how to do it, what language or terminology to use, or what assistance to offer, do not be afraid to ask them. That person should be your first and best resource.

Remember that disabled people have different preferences.

Just because one person with a disability prefers something one way does not mean that another person with the same disability also prefers it that way.

Ask before you help.

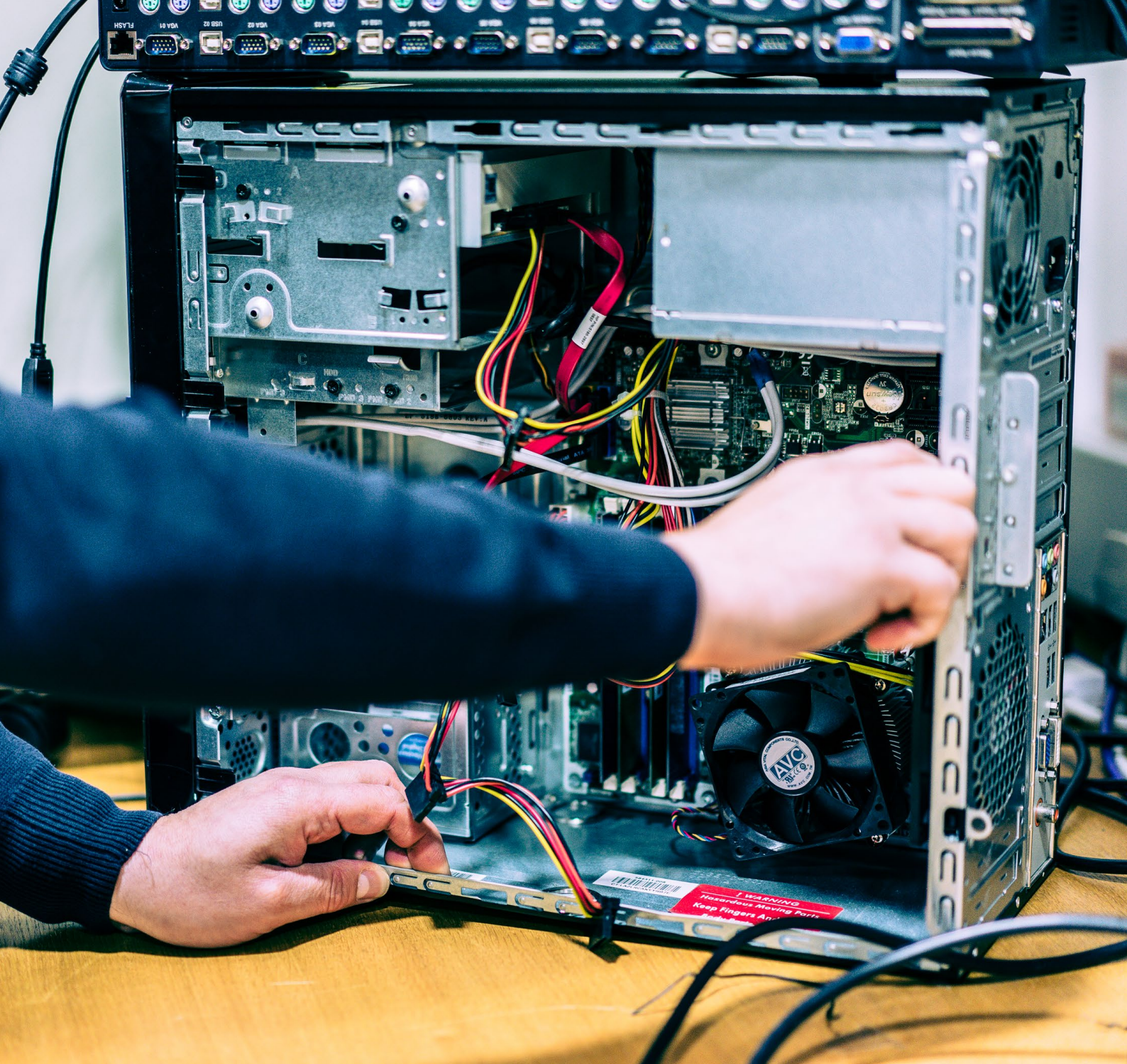
Before you help someone, ask if they require assistance. In some cases a disabled person might seem to be struggling, yet they are fine and would prefer to complete the task on their own. Follow the person's cues and ask if you are not sure what to do. Do not be offended if someone declines your offer of assistance.

Talk directly to the disabled person, not to the interpreter, support worker, or job coach.

You do not need to ignore the others entirely; just make sure to focus your interaction with the disabled person.

Speak normally.

Some people have a tendency to talk louder and slower to disabled people. Do not assume that because a person has one disability, that he also has a cognitive disability or is hard of hearing. For example, a person with cerebral palsy might use a wheelchair, have uncontrolled upper body movements, have difficulty speaking, and yet have very good hearing, cognitive abilities, and high intelligence.



Speak as you would to any other person of a similar age and in a similar role. Never speak or behave towards an adult as though they were a child.

Avoid potentially offensive terms or euphemisms.

Commonly accepted terminology includes “disabled people” and “a person with visual/hearing/physical/speech/ cognitive impairment.” Many people find annoying or offensive terms such as, restricted to a wheelchair, victim of, suffers from, retarded, deformed, crippled, and euphemisms such as physically challenged. If you are unsure, ask the person with a disability what terminology he or she prefers.

Do not be embarrassed if you use common expressions such as ‘see you later’ to someone who may have a visual impairment. Everyday phrases and expressions are fine.

Advice when communicating with people with different conditions

The following provides some guidance and tips when communicating with people who have specific conditions:

People who are deaf or hard of hearing

The first language of people who are born deaf, or become deaf before spoken language is acquired, is normally British Sign Language. However, it should not be assumed that a person with a hearing impairment can sign.

Here are a few general pointers to bear in mind when meeting someone who has experienced hearing loss:

- Remember to speak to the person you are meeting, rather than their interpreter
- If you need to catch the person's attention, you should do so by lightly touching their shoulder or by waving your hand
- Interpreters should only work for half an hour before being given a break. Meetings of more than 2 hours should have 2 interpreters working
- At the start of any meeting you should check with the person that they have no objection to being provided with confidential information via an interpreter. If they object, an alternative should be arranged for this

When arranging to meet someone who is deaf or hard of hearing, consider also:

- Setting up a meeting room free from background noise or with a minimum of noise
- Fitting an induction loop, which amplifies sound for an interview or other type of meeting or event where you know someone with a hearing aid will be present
- Making clear at the outset of a meeting that one person at a time should speak and that all comments or questions should be directed through the chair

If you need to contact someone with a hearing impairment, email or text messages are preferred over a telephone call. Where it is essential to communicate by telephone, ensure you speak clearly and any answer phone messages are kept brief.



People who lip-read

Lip-reading is a specialist skill that some deaf people use. You can ask people if they lip-read when you meet them. If they do, it is best to:

- Look directly at them and speak slowly and clearly, making sure that your face can be seen
- Keep sentences reasonably short
- Use suitable facial expressions or other body language to emphasise what you are trying to convey
- Do not make assumptions that the person does/does not understand, clarify with the person, e.g. use written notes

People who are visually impaired

When meeting someone who is visually impaired it is good practice to:

- Identify yourself clearly and introduce anyone else who is present in the room and indicate where they are placed in relation to the person who is visually impaired
- Say the name of the person you are talking to when part of a group
- Make sure you let the person know when you have ended a conversation and want to move away
- Take care not to distract a person's guide dog. Speak to the person, not the dog
- Ask the individual if they want assistance with guiding to an office or room location

When arranging to meet someone with a visual impairment, ensure that:

- The room has good levels of light and a means of controlling glare
- The meeting or interview room is clearly signposted or that a member of staff is on hand to offer assistance

People with impaired speech

When meeting someone with speech impairment, it is helpful to:

- Be attentive and patient, because it can take longer for someone to make their point
- Avoid correcting or speaking for the person; wait quietly while the person speaks and resist the temptation to finish his or her sentences
- Tell the person if you do not understand (if you have difficulty understanding, do not pretend!)

People with impaired mobility

When meeting someone with impaired mobility:

- Stand in front of the person and try and place yourself at their eye level
- Do not move about so that the person has to continually change position in order to speak directly to you
- Talk directly to a wheelchair user, not to their companion
- Do not lean on a wheelchair – you are invading the body space of the user

There are a number of steps that can be taken in advance if you are going to be interviewing or meeting someone who has a mobility difficulty. For example you can:

- Check that there are suitable parking facilities close to your meeting place
- Make sure that the entrance is level, or has a ramp
- Ensure that the doors are easy to open or that a member of staff is available to offer assistance with heavy or revolving doors
- Check where the nearest accessible toilets are located
- Organise a meeting room that is easy to get to for someone using a wheelchair or walking aids, and ensure that it has sufficient space to allow the disabled person to remain fully mobile and unobstructed

People with learning disabilities

People with a learning disability can take longer to learn new things and are likely to have limited literacy or numeracy skills. A learning disability is a stable condition which does not fluctuate and cannot be treated. Without adjustments, traditional recruitment processes do not work effectively. Job coaching and supported employment (as provided by Guernsey Employment Trust) is recommended to help the individual to apply and learn the job.

The best advice is to be patient and encourage the individual. It is also worth noting the following:

- Be prepared to explain more than once if necessary, and do not assume you will be understood; ask the person to stop you if they do not understand
- Do not ask multiple questions
- Keep the sentence structure concise and jargon-free
- Use clear and unambiguous language, whether in written or verbal communication. This is something that everyone can benefit from
- A person with a learning disability may have access to a job coach, non-legal advocate or support worker who provides employment assistance if required – if so, allow that person to attend the interview



People with a mental health condition

Having a mental health condition is not the same as having a learning disability. An estimated one in four people experience some kind of mental health issue in their lives and current research indicates that at any one time 1 worker in 6 will be experiencing depression, anxiety or problems related to stress. Stigma, lack of understanding, fear of failure and not wanting to be seen as weak, can prevent an individual from recognising or asking for help. The result is that staff may not take action to positively manage their mental health as soon as possible, and will not ask for support measures to be put in place.

Encourage people to talk – people can find it difficult to talk about their mental health but it helps to have an open culture where conversations about mental health are routine and normalised. Ask simple, open and non-judgmental questions and let people explain in their own words how their mental health problem manifests, the triggers, how it impacts on their work and what support they need. Listen to people and respond flexibly – everyone’s experience of a mental health problem is different so treat people as individuals and focus on the person, not the problem.

Don’t make assumptions – do not try to guess what symptoms an employee might have and how these might affect their ability to do their job – many people are able to manage their mental health and perform their role to a high standard but may require support measures when experiencing a difficult period.

Reasonable workplace adjustments are crucial to support staff to cope and recover and to reduce the length of mental health related sickness absence. These steps are generally quite small and could involve a simple adjustment to someone’s job role, or extra support from their manager. Often the necessary change is one of attitude, expectations or communication – rather than a major change or significant cost. However, effective steps tend to be very individual, therefore have a meaningful conversation with your employee about their needs, really listen to them and agree a time to review any adjustments made. While voluntary and agreed adjustments are supportive, it is important that people are not treated differently or asked to do things that others are not required to.

It is worth remembering:

- It can be helpful to consider where the person wants to meet, because this gives them a choice of what would be the most comfortable setting, for example a neutral, private place where you will not be interrupted
- Sometimes people like to have the opportunity to have a supporter or non-legal advocate with them
- People need to be reassured of confidentiality. Discuss with the individual what information they would like shared and with whom
- People may not always be ready to talk straight away so it’s important you outline what support is available, tell them your door is always open and let them know you’ll make sure they get the support they need
- Be positive – focus on what people can do, rather than what they can’t



There is a wide range of assistance available for employers from Guernsey Mind who can offer support, training and advice about mental health and well-being to local employers. See Sources of Support on page 59 for contact details.

People with an autistic spectrum condition (ASC)

People with an autistic spectrum condition like everyone else, have a variety of interests, skills and abilities although they experience the world a bit differently to the way most other people do. They can often thrive in a structured and well-organised environment and have strengths that are advantageous to an employer such as accuracy, good eye for detail, reliability and meticulous application of routine tasks. However, they may experience varying (but often mild) challenges with the following:

- Difficulty in reading facial expressions and body language, therefore they may not be able to interpret whether someone is happy, sad, angry etc.
- Eye contact may make them feel uncomfortable and it may look like they are not listening, however they absorb more information if they just concentrate on the spoken word.
- Although they may have a good sense of humour, inferences, allusions etc. are often lost on them and they don't always 'get the joke'.
- They may become quiet and withdrawn when situations become overwhelming.
- They may take a little longer to process language and may not be able to understand a lot of information at one time.
- They may find it difficult to build social relationships, start or maintain a conversation or engage in small talk.
- Sensory issues such as sensitivity to artificial lighting, noise, smells, touch – these can all cause sensory overload. These can be easily overcome by switching off artificial lighting or the individual wearing tinted glasses, keeping noise to a minimum or allowing the individual to wear headphones.

During a discussion or perhaps an interview, you should consider the following points:

- Be specific in your questions. For example 'Tell me about yourself' is very vague and the candidate may not be able to judge exactly what you want to know. A better question would be 'Tell me about any jobs/voluntary work you have done in the past five years'.
- Avoid hypothetical or abstract questions, for example 'How do you think you'll cope with working if there are lots of interruptions?' A better question would be 'In your last job how did you cope with your work when people interrupted you?'
- If the candidate is talking too much, tactfully let them know, for example 'Thank you, you've told us enough about that now and I'd like to ask you another question'.
- Give the candidate time to process the question before answering and only ask one question at a time.
- They may interpret language literally; therefore asking 'How did you find your last job?' may result in an answer of 'I looked in the map book'.
- Do not offer to shake hands as touch can often be unpleasant for them.
- Be precise in telling them when you will get back to them and don't make promises you cannot keep. For example 'I'll get back to you tomorrow' but can't get back to them for 2 days. This will cause them unnecessary anxiety. If you are unsure whether you will get back to them tomorrow, tell them you will get back to them by the end of the week.
- As individuals with autism often have sensory difficulties, if possible switch off the lighting, avoid excessive noise, and interact one-to-one rather than in a group.

People with ASC can and do make effective and efficient employees. Positive aspects for an employer can include:

- An organised and methodical approach and a love of order and logical sequences.
- Task orientated, highly focused and very productive.
- Have strong written communication skills.
- Unusual perspective on some things, therefore see new ways of approaching tasks, ideas and solutions.

People with a brain injury

A brain injury may be caused as a result of a stroke, a brain tumour or a blow to the head from some form of accident. All brain injuries are different and people may be affected to a varying degree by any number of problems depending on the severity of their injury and the area of the brain which is affected.

When interacting or communicating with someone with a brain injury:

- Listen and allow the individual the time to talk. It may take some time for the individual to articulate themselves and to get their message across, but they will appreciate your patience.
- There should be only one person speaking at a time and where possible reduce background noise.
- The individual may have difficulty processing language quickly and be unable to understand a lot of information at one time. Therefore, talk clearly and slowly and do not rush.
- Just because a person may have communication difficulties, this does not reflect the social competence and intelligence of a person with a brain injury.

People with dyslexia

Dyslexia makes some things harder to learn – it puts barriers in the way of progress. But, almost always, those barriers can be overcome, especially with the right kind of help and support. Dyslexia is not related to intellect and should not be connected to intellectual capacity in any way.

It is wrong to think of dyslexia as just a reading problem. Many people with dyslexia can become quite good readers, whilst others may read slowly with inaccuracies. Usually, the most persistent difficulty is with spelling.

It is also wrong to think of dyslexia as just a problem with written words. Many, but not all, can also experience some difficulty with spoken words, especially coming up with a specific name or date when under pressure of time, or remembering a list or sequence of spoken words such as a telephone number.

It should be noted that many individuals, particularly those aged 40 and over, may never have been diagnosed with dyslexia despite displaying typical traits. With the appropriate adjustments, the effects of dyslexia can be minimised.

Employers should give consideration to the following:

- Offer alternatives to written application forms
- Explore what coping strategies the individual uses to minimise the impact of dyslexia
- Avoid complex multiple instructions
- Introducing the use of memory aids such as Dictaphones
- Avoid asking the individual to read aloud
- Changing colour schemes to computer screens or papers (the individual may be able to advise)

People with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)

If people with HIV are diagnosed early and respond to treatment they can be healthy, work and have relationships like anyone else and have a long life expectancy. Coming to terms with HIV diagnosis and getting used to treatment can be very difficult, and people living with HIV will often need support from healthcare providers, friends and family, employers and support organisations.

It's important to remember that people living with HIV are able to work just like anyone else.

There is no risk of HIV transmission through everyday work contact for either colleagues or the public.

If someone discloses their HIV status to you, or a member of your staff, it is important to respond in a sensitive manner. Remember, many HIV positive employees may fear that they will be treated unfairly, so it is important to reassure them that you will respect their confidentiality and support them to manage their condition at work.

People with more than one condition or impairment

- Some people have more than one condition or impairment which can have a cumulative effect where one condition can compound on another
- Again it is always best to ask the person about their preference



Communication methods

Information must be made available that is understandable and accessible by all. Some disabled people will need information to be provided in different formats. Not all communication provided by the organisation needs to be provided in every format, this would be expensive and time-consuming, but it is important to have an awareness of what different methods are available and how to produce these quickly if they are required. Local and national support organisations may be able to provide these services. The most common alternative communication methods are as follows:

Audio

Audio has the benefit that everyone is able to use it except those with very significant hearing loss. It is of particular benefit to people with learning disabilities, visual impairments, low literacy levels, or those who may have problems with their hands. You will need to decide whether to make a recording yourself or to go through a transcription agency. Doing it yourself may be appropriate if responding to an individual request, whilst an agency can produce a recording with a more 'professional' feel, often including music and other effects.

Electronic

Making information available in electronic format can be a more accessible, cheap and easy way to reach a growing number of blind and partially sighted people who have access to computers and other information technology devices.

Braille

Braille is a system of raised dots which some blind people can read with their fingers, it is named after its creator, Frenchman Louis Braille. Some blind and partially sighted people prefer particular types of information in Braille, for example information to be used in meetings or to be read silently. There are only a few people in Guernsey who use Braille and it would be unlikely that there would be a requirement for employers to provide materials in Braille.

Large Print

For the majority of blind and partially sighted people, larger print is essential. No single size is suitable for everyone but most people prefer their large print in the range of 16 to 22 point in a clear font such as Arial. Text should be well spaced out; 1.5 – 2 point spacing.

Legibility and Colour Contrast

Legibility or how well you can distinguish type on the page can be influenced by many factors. Legibility is mainly concerned with the use of the typeface or font used on the page. The legibility of a document can impact on how long the document takes to read.

Colour contrast between the font colour and the background both on the web and in print can impact those with a visual impairment, if there is not sufficient contrast the text is harder to distinguish.

Some colour contrasts can be beneficial particularly to those who are dyslexic or have learning difficulties, although colour combinations are as much down to personal preference, often black text on a yellow background can be often beneficial, so consider printing onto different colour paper. Setting the text at good default font size of around 12pts will help whether it is on screen or in print.

On the web it is important that the font size can be increased in size on the page by making changes to the text size in the browser. This will affect content within text boxes, so in order to avoid text overflow, it is important that the text boxes increase in size along with the text.

British sign language (BSL) interpreters

BSL is a visual language, communicated in a variety of ways: using specific signs, different hand shapes and movements, facial expressions, lip patterns and upper body movements. Within Britain the most common form of Sign Language is called British Sign Language (BSL). BSL has its own grammatical structure and syntax, as a language it is not dependant nor is it strongly related to spoken English. BSL is the preferred language of around 145,000 people within the UK.

Lip-speakers

Lip-speakers convey a speaker's message to lip-readers without using their voice. They produce clearly the shape of the words, the flow, rhythm and phrasing of natural speech and repeat the stress used by the speaker.

Deafblind interpreters

Communication methods used by deafblind people vary greatly depending on the amount of residual sight and hearing. Some will be able to hear speech, lip-read and use sign language; many of those who can't hear speech or see sufficiently to follow lip-reading or visual sign language will use some form of tactile communication.

Minicoms /Textphones

Minicoms/Textphones allow hearing impaired people to communicate over the telephone using a keyboard and visual display.

Useful websites

The following websites provide guidance and information on alternative communication methods:

[Royal Association for Deaf People \(RAD\)](http://www.royaldeaf.org.uk)

www.royaldeaf.org.uk

[The British Deaf Association](http://www.bda.org.uk)

www.bda.org.uk

[The Association of Lipspeakers \(ALS\)](http://www.lipspeaking.co.uk)

www.lipspeaking.co.uk

[The British Computer Association of the Blind](http://www.bcab.org.uk)

www.bcab.org.uk

[Deafblind UK](http://www.deafblind.org.uk)

www.deafblind.org.uk

[Sense for Deafblind People](http://www.sense.org.uk)

www.sense.org.uk

[The Royal National Institute of Blind People](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

www.rnib.org.uk

[UK Association for Accessible Formats](http://www.ukaaf.org)

www.ukaaf.org