

Communicating

with Children and Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities



Children and youth are more likely to accept advice about making healthy choices when they feel respected and understood. Use a strength-based approach when talking to or about any child.

Strength-based

- Emphasize an individual's positive qualities and successes, not their challenges.
- Recognize that everyone has challenges and may need support.
- Consider everyone in the context of their family, culture and community.

When speaking about a child

- Use person first language. Say: she is a student with Down syndrome. Not: she is a Downs student.
- Avoid negative labeling. Saying someone suffers from developmental delays can be hurtful and stigmatizing.
- Understand that an individual's disability does not define them—it's just one part of who they are.
- Seek additional help from someone who knows the individual well when you need more information about their strengths and needs.

When talking to a child or young person with a disability

- Learn how they communicate before you meet. For example many children use visual aids such as pictures or photos to express themselves.
- Talk directly to the individual; avoid talking mostly to the aide, parent, or caregiver.
- Do not make assumptions about their cognitive abilities just because they cannot communicate clearly.
- Do not assume that a child or young person with a specific disability is just like other people with the same disability.
- Give a child or young person with a disability more time to respond to your questions and to ask questions of their own.
- Do not offer exaggerated praise or too much attention for every day accomplishments.
- Find out how they understand their disability. Use the same words they use to describe their disability. Avoid using your own terms.

TIP

Learn more from the [US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov/) [Division of Human Development and Disability](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/)