

IMAGINE YOURSELF . . . A WHEELCHAIR USER

Imagine you are in a wheelchair- you are currently around 3 foot tall and have to go everywhere in your chair with wheels. Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a doorway of a building, reaching for food or drinks on a standard sized table, in a crowded room with people twice as tall as you are, and wheeling down a rocky footpath or at your local park.

WHAT WOULD YOU NEED TO HAPPEN SO THAT YOU CAN FEEL UNDERSTOOD?



Communication tips: wheelchair user

In general:

- Remember, emotions are like gatekeepers for information. The person won't hear your message unless they feel safe and can trust you.
- Be aware that trauma can sit behind apparently irrational or disengaged behaviour.
- Ensure a quiet, calm environment where possible to minimise stress.
- Try to assess the person's communication needs at the outset and adjust your communication style accordingly.
- Check if the person needs a support person or companion with them.
- Speak to the person not their companion.
- Speak normally. Don't exaggerate your speech or movements.
- Introduce yourself by name.
- Address the person by name
- Be patient and give your undivided attention.
- Listen carefully and avoid assuming too much.
- Don't patronise or talk down to the person.
- Inform the person of what you are about to do; say why; and say what you need them to do for you.
- Stop and check comprehension from time to time.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person to do or say something.
- Relax. Anyone can make mistakes. Offer an apology if you feel you've caused embarrassment. Keep a sense of humour and be willing to communicate.

Specifically:

- A person's personal space can include their wheelchair and crutches. Do not touch or push a person's wheelchair or move their crutches or walking stick without their permission.
- Try to find something to sit on in order to be at eye level with the person.
- Face the person directly and maintain eye contact.
- Speak normally