



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

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