

## APPROACHABILITY CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE WITH IDDS

People with IDDs can form strong personal connections like anyone else, but many people feel uncomfortable about or don't know how to approach them. When you do take the time to connect with a person with an IDD, you'll likely have a rewarding experience. It's easier than you expect to find common ground and even start a friendship that can last a lifetime.

Below are a few tips that can help you in approaching community members with IDDs.

### **Treat them like you would any other friend or acquaintance.**

- The most important thing to remember when interacting with people with IDDs is that they are generally just like everyone else. They are individuals with their own opinions, passions and thoughts. Show them respect and kindness. Use open body language and a smile.
- Approaching someone with an IDD for the first time is just like other first meetings. Introduce yourself, ask questions, listen and share your thoughts. Unless you know specifics about them, there's no need to behave differently.

### **Don't speak slower or change your communication style unless they ask.**

- Many people with IDDs can understand regular speech, and slowing down or modifying how you talk can be condescending to them. For example, baby talk or a singsong voice should not be used for teenagers and adults with IDDs. Talk at your normal speed and volume, and they will let you know if you need to change.
- Give them time to express themselves at their own pace. Some of them may stammer or have trouble connecting words. If they get frustrated, upset or distracted, don't take it personally. Stay calm and enjoy your conversation.

### **Speak directly to people with IDDs, not to other people with them.**

- Most people with IDDs prefer to be directly addressed, even if they seem quiet or withdrawn. A frustrating, if common, experience for people with IDDs is when people hold entire conversations about them as if they are not there.
- You shouldn't assume people with IDDs aren't listening based on their body language. For instance, people with autism can fidget and look elsewhere, but it doesn't mean they aren't paying attention.



### **It's okay to offer help, but don't push it.**

- People with IDDs will not be offended if you offer help, but do so in an open-ended way such as, "If you ever need any help, just let me know."
- If you see someone struggling, you can ask "Do you need help?" or "Would you like me to help?" Then, listen to their answer. If they say no, remember that they know themselves and what's best for them. They can tell you if there is a problem with which they need help.

### **START A CONVERSATION TODAY.**

- It's always a great feeling to establish a genuine connection with someone. So never be afraid to have a friendly conversation with someone with an IDD. Ask them about themselves. For example: "How are you?" "What are you doing today?" "What are your favorite things to do?"
- If you're ready to connect with people in Northeast Florida who have IDDs, learn more ways that you can get involved by visiting [ConnectABLEJax.com](http://ConnectABLEJax.com)