

## 12 TIPS FOR SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



1. A positive attitude and a smiling face make everyone feel more comfortable. Be friendly. Be encouraging and use praise whenever possible. People rise to the occasion when the best is expected of them. Using a positive statement like, "Think positively" rather than "Don't complain" sets a more encouraging tone.
2. Make sure everyone is safe. Always know the whereabouts of those with whom you are partnered.
3. Ask if the person needs help. Make eye contact, especially if the person is hearing impaired. If you cannot understand the person's speech, tell them that you don't understand and ask them to repeat for you. Repeating back what you think they said is sometimes helpful. If you still are having difficulty, explain that you simply cannot understand and ask them to be patient with you. Don't pretend to understand, as that can feel demeaning to the person trying to communicate.
4. Remember, people are people. Acting differently around people with special needs is unnecessary. Everyone responds to a positive, inclusive, welcoming, relaxed atmosphere.
5. Always show respect. Make a point to see the person first and not his or her disability. A difficult part of being disabled is having others think you can do less than you are capable of doing.
6. Really important! Use people-first language.

*Correct:* Tom is a young man with Down syndrome. Tom has Down syndrome.

*Incorrect:* Tom is Downs. Tom is a Downs. Tom is Down syndrome.

7. When changing from one activity to another or changing locations, letting someone know in advance what is expected of them and allowing a little transitional time is helpful.
8. Don't offer a choice if there isn't one. For example, it is better to state, "It is time to go to your workshop now," rather than ask, "Would you like to go to your workshop now?"
9. Be gentle, but firm with a soft, calming voice. Avoid confrontation. Diverting and noting what there is to look forward to can change a negative situation into a positive one.
10. Patience is key. Imagine yourself in a foreign country where the language is difficult for you, and others find you difficult to understand. Think how it might be if you weren't certain about what was socially acceptable in a new setting. If someone is acting inappropriately, simply ask him or her to stop. Often, an encouragement to "be cool" will steer an individual into the best way to behave.
11. In our society, adults hug friends, not new acquaintances. We want to encourage appropriate social greetings. A handshake or high five is acceptable for teens and adults, while a hug often is not. This might be tricky, as many attending the NDSC conference are old friends where a hug is very appropriate.
12. Relax, have fun, and make some new friends.