



Emergency Services – Guide

ADA: Effective Communications with Persons with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed into law in 1990 to ensure that people with disabilities are afforded the same rights and privileges as non-disabled individuals. The City of Kingsport is dedicated to ensuring that no qualified person with a disability be excluded from participating in, or denied the benefits of the programs, services, and activities provided by the city based on a disability.

Safety

Emergency service providers must be aware of their personal safety and the safety of the public. Be aware when contacting persons with disabilities, not to adopt a false sense of security. There are no “boiler plate” tactics to employ when contacting all persons with a disability, but this guide will provide some pointers and existing tactics.

Disability Etiquette

- Introduce yourself. Shake hands or touch the person on the arm or shoulder to welcome and acknowledge their presence. Treat people as you would like to be treated!
- Be yourself – everyone will feel more comfortable if you relax. Speak directly to that person – face to face. If the person is in a wheelchair, use a chair, in order to communicate at the person’s eye level.
- Be courteous, but not condescending. Offer assistance in a dignified manner with sensitivity and respect and realize that asking first is better than assuming help is needed.
- Words Set the Tone – So use Words with Dignity. Place the individual first – “a person with a disability.” Avoid words such as, “handicapped” or “cripple” which are not only inappropriate and outdated but, demeaning.

Medical Attention to Disabled Person

- Mobility devices should be transported along with individuals. In such instances, where the device is too large to transport with the individual the device can be transported by another agency or service provider. Contact Dispatch for assistance.
- People with disabilities should not normally be separated from their service animals even in places where pets are typically not allowed. Service animals shall be permitted to accompany their owners in ambulances, *etc.* unless the presence of the animal will disrupt emergency or urgent care or there is some basis for crew members to believe that the safety of the crew, the individual or others would be compromised by the presence of the service animal being transported with the individual being served. Acceptable alternative methods of transporting service animals to receiving facilities include family, friends, or law enforcement.
- Please consider documenting if the patient utilizes a service animal, and whether the animal was transported with or without the patient, the means used to transport, and describe the reason the animal was not transported with the patient.

Calling for Assistance

General Accessibility Concerns & Questions

ADA Coordinator, George DeCroes

Phone No.: (423) 229-9309, ADAcontact@KingsportTN.gov

Sign Language Interpreter

In compliance with the ADA, all Kingsport emergency service have access to Sign Language Interpreters 24 hours a day at **(800) 207-10424 PIN 56123**.

Language Line is available 24 hours a day for translation services in various languages including ASL via video phone at **(800) 207-1424 PIN 56123**.

Service Animals – Critical Issues

Service animals assist people with various disabilities some of which are apparent or invisible. Never touch a service animal or the person it assists without permission. Service animals are working so do not distract them as loss of their concentration could put their owners in danger. A service animal is not required to have any special certification.

- Per Tenn. Code Ann. § 62-7-112, it is illegal to interfere with the use of a service animal and to deny access to a disabled person because of a service animal in a public conveyance or accommodation.
- Handling service animal calls – determine if the animal is a service animal by asking if the animal is a pet or service animal. You should not ask a person about their disability, however; you can ask how the animal assists that person. Certification or other proof as a service animal is not required.
- Incident reports are suggested when persons are refused access to any local establishment, *etc.*

Arrest – Disabled Persons

- Disabled persons may be allowed to transport themselves from their device to the rear of the patrol car. Mobility devices may be transported along with individuals.
- Be aware that some disabled persons may not be able to sit in an erect position or have the upper body strength to transfer themselves. In such instances, alternative transportation can be requested to transport in their device via another agency or service provider. Contact Dispatch for assistance.
- Consider documenting if the arrestee utilizes a service animal, whether the animal was released to a third-party (by consent of arrestee only) or transported by animal services.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

People who are deaf or hard of hearing will have varying degrees of hearing loss, different cultural identities, and a wide range of communication needs. Members of the American Deaf culture community share a common language, American Sign Language (ASL), which has its own grammar distinctly different from English. ASL is not universal, but rather, the most used language by individuals in the United States.

- For many, the correct term is Deaf. Others describe themselves as Hearing-Impaired, Hard of Hearing or deafened.
- **Never** use terms such as, deaf-mute, dumb, or handicapped.
- **Always ask** the individual directly which term is preferred.

Approaching Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- **Get the persons' attention** with a wave or gentle tap on the shoulder.
- **Face the person**, maintain eye contact. Make sure there's adequate lighting.
- **Identify yourself** using visual cues. Point to your name tag and star.
- **To ask if the person is deaf**, point with one hand to your ear and mouth and then to the person.
- **Ask the person directly**, or in writing, for his or her preferred mode of communication.
- **If the person prefers to lip-read**, speak normally and ask if you can be understood.
- **Do not assume a lip-reader**, can understand everything only 30% of speech is discernable by lips.
- **Offer to communicate in writing** when necessary. Do not assume the person is fluent in English.
- **If the person prefers ASL**, call an interpreter.
- **Do not rely on family members or friends** to communicate. The law mandates the services of a qualified interpreter.

Vision Impairments

Some indications that a person may be blind or visually impaired could be the use of a white cane, guide dog or service animal, jerky motion of the eyes, positioning themselves close to material to read, or they may rock back and forth when standing. This behavior may appear to indicate intoxication; be sure to investigate the cause of this behavior prior to making any judgments.

- **Identify yourself** as an officer/firefighter. When interviewing persons with vision impairments it may be helpful to have them walk you through the incident or location.
- If you must assist, offer your arm and let the individual take it; do not lead or grab the person's arm, clothing or cane. **Avoid Exposing Your Gun Side.**
- **Check the person before touching** his/her person or service animal. The animal by nature and training is protective of their owner.
- **Do not shout**, but do give the individual verbal cues and explain if you are leaving, moving, *etc.*

Developmental Disabilities

A disability which originates before an individual attains age of 18 continues, or can be expected to continue, indefinitely, and constitutes a substantial disability for that individual. This term includes mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, and disabling conditions closely related to mental retardation.

- **Do not assume** people with **Developmental Disabilities** are "mentally ill."
- **Common behaviors** may include slow response times, difficulty speaking, understanding instructions, and ability to recall certain facts. **Be patient.**
- **Keep conversations simple.** Repeat questions or ask questions in different ways.
- Don't ask leading or yes/no questions.

Mobility Impairments

Lack of mobility may be caused by nervous system damage, muscular-skeletal injury, disease, aging, accident, or may be a result of an act of violence. Devices include wheelchairs, canes, motorized scooters, braces, and walkers.

Take a person with mobility impairment as you would anyone else. Do not take a condescending position and do not lean on their device (*i.e.* wheelchair).

In some situations it is more effective to communicate with the person at **eye level** but, do not pace yourself at a disadvantage. **Step back a few feet from the device to create a safety zone.**