

General Considerations

It is important to know that each individual's experience of living with a disability is their own.

Disabilities can range widely among survivors and how they identify with having a disability.

Even though we can use general considerations and information to help support individuals with disabilities, a 'good rule of thumb' is to **ask the individual what will work best for them** to support them.

They are the expert in their life and experiences. Their needs may differ from general considerations.

Some general considerations are (obtained, in part, from CALCASA: Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault with Disabilities, 2010):

- Remember you are speaking to an adult. Talk to the survivor, not a support person, caregiver, interpreter or assistant.
- Ask the individual, in ways that are accessible to them, how they best can be supported. Make any necessary accommodations.
- Do not call a child abuse center or child advocate to respond to an adult with a disability.
- Utilize other methods of communication – write, sign, or speak the message.
- Avoid euphemisms such as “physically challenged,” “differently-abled” or “handicapped”. Many disability groups and individuals with disabilities object

to these phrases because they are considered condescending and reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be spoken of in an upfront and direct manner.

- Do not sensationalize a disability by using terms such as “afflicted with,” “suffers from,” or “crippled with.” These expressions are considered offensive and inaccurate to people with disabilities.
- Use person first language.
- If you see that a possible accommodation may be made, ask the individual’s permission first to make that accommodation or helping.
- If you don’t understand someone with a disability, ask for clarification from the person instead of pretending you understand.
- Remember that most people (85%) with intellectual disabilities have a mild disability. Avoid talking down to an individual, or talking to an adult like a child.
- Be aware of any accommodation that might help aid communication (ASL interpreter), understanding (altering word choice to offer alternative ways of explaining), or mobility (giving someone with a visual disability information about the layout of a room) – let the survivor decide how to communicate.