

North American Inclusion Month

NAIM

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE JEWISH COMMUNITY

What do you say after you say “Hello”?

When you engage an individual who is disabled, in many ways, they are very much like us. They feel good when they are complimented, cry when they are sad, are happy when they are with friends, and feel lonely when they are by themselves.

When you approach an individual with a disability and start a conversation. You know that the first thing you say is “hello”, but what comes next?

When meeting anyone for the first time whoever they are, you try to discover your common interests. You treat them kindly and respectfully. The same is true here.

1. How to begin? What would you normally do when you want to meet someone new? You normally begin a conversation with a topic you think the person might be interested in. You can talk about something that you have heard happened to them lately, or a “safe” topic like the Weather, Sports, TV - Movies etc.

Try the same when you engage a peer with a disability:

“Isn’t it a beautiful day today!” “You look so nice in that outfit” or “Did you see ...?”

2. Ok, so let’s say you try, but no response. What now? If this happened to you with a “non-handicapped” person, you would probably assume that they did not hear or understand you. Most probably you would repeat the question.

Assume the same with an individual with a disability, but with a twist. Repeat the question again using their name and make eye contact, maybe they just did not hear you or were not paying attention.



For more information contact:
Yachad, The National Jewish Council for Disabilities



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Still no response? Try asking the question in another way, point to what you are talking about.

3. Blank stares? If this happened to you with a child, you might think he/she might be shy. If it happened with an elderly person, you might think them confused or unable to respond. In either case you might want to put them at ease, with you continuing the conversation yourself. You might share something that happened to you, or continue talking about something they are either wearing or holding or doing.

Don't give up! As with anyone they like to be spoken to and like to listen to others. You may say "Yes, the weather is nice. Let me tell you what happened to me last night."

4. Let's say a person with a disability responds to something totally different than what you were talking about.

If this happened when you were speaking to a "non -handicapped" person, you would politely either bring back the topic or forget what you were talking about and respond to that comment.

Do the same here. You could say, "That's interesting, but let me ask you again about school or your job".

Some added Pointers:

5. Didn't I hear that already? Some individuals with developmental disabilities have a tendency to repeat information that they told you already. It is OK to say "you told me that already, let's talk about something else."

6. Isn't that personal? What to do if someone asks you something personal or inappropriate- Honesty is the best way to handle this. "I think that is something private, that you should not be talking to me about. Let's talk about something else".



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7. Are we too close? Some people may tend to invade personal space when engaging in conversation. It is ok to both step back and create more space or say, “I still can hear you if you take a step back.”

8. Excuse me: Most of us have been taught to say excuse me when two other people are having a conversation and you want to speak. Some may seem to have trouble with this, but it is OK to say, “I am talking now, I will speak to you when I am finished.”

9. Ending a conversation: If you find yourself in a situation where someone is talking to you but you need to go, it is ok to say “I’m sorry but I have to go now, we can continue this conversation later (or the next time I see you).”

Adults with disabilities need to be treated as adults. Otherwise they do not learn to act mature, and socially behave in an acceptable manner.

As you interact more individuals with disabilities you will realize more and more how much they are like you and how much they have to offer.

Have Fun and Enjoy !

For more Information:

Feel free to contact the Yachad office at (212)613-8229



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