



Richmond Centre for Disability

“Promoting a new perspective on disability”

2012 Business Excellence Awards – Association of the Year Winner

Volunteer Training – Interactive Strategies How to Work Better with People with Disabilities

I. STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATION

When communicating with people with disabilities, there are some common areas that are often overlooked.

- They need more time to process information
- They need more cues or prompts, e.g. visual cues to help understanding of the verbal cues
- Made sure the person understand what you want them to do by **rephrasing** and **demonstration**

If you have asked someone to do something and he/she refuses or is unresponsive, try rephrasing your request and demonstrate what you would like them to do. Make sure they understand what you want them to do.

- Often someone refuses to comply or do as asked; because he/she has simply not been able to put the information together or is confused about what is going to happen.

Another common difficulty is to understand what the person is saying. Many people with disabilities have speech problem such as language delay or have trouble pronouncing certain words.

- Some people can be extremely sensitive to being misunderstood and may become frustrated easily or withdrawn.

Imagine if you keep trying to tell someone something over and over, and they cannot understand you, frustration builds up. It is easy to understand why a person might act out or refuse to participate if they are having this experience.

When dealing with this situation, ask the person to say it one more time and if you still do not get it, ask them to show you.

II. STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING PARTICIPATION

Some of the individuals attending RCD activities will need assistance to interact with their peers. This can be done in a variety of ways:

1. **Assisted facilitation** – you would assist the individual in approaching a group and asking to join.

Example: John really likes playing table tennis, can he join you? (if John has trouble communicating)

Or: John, I know you really like table tennis, would you like to ask if you can play?

If the person is resistant, check in; is this an activity he enjoys? Does he know how to play the game? It is important to ask yourself and the person what the issue is if they are resistant to joining.

2. **Partial participation** – some people may find it difficult to fully participate in all aspects of an activity. One option is to have them participate in portions of the activity rather than the whole thing.

Example: The activity is swimming and John refuses to get in the pool. Ask John if he would like to be in charge of the towel/bags/etc. Provide an option that is not punishment for feeling uncomfortable with the activity and promotes interaction.

(John's going to be our towel guy! If you need something, see John!)

3. **Supported interaction** – join the person in the activity; make it look super fun and exciting. Be over enthusiastic (Wow! I love doing It's so fun ...)

It is essential to understand that we all interact and understand the world around us differently. We all have things that are difficult for us. When encountering a person who appears to not "want" to be socially involved, remind yourself that we all enjoy and need some level of human interaction and that this person simply may not know how to initiate the interaction. Always provide positive reinforcement after the person completes the interaction, even if it is fully assisted.

Example: Wasn't that fun! Think Suzy really enjoyed playing with you! Way to go!

Useful hints:

- ❖ Be creative
- ❖ Be considerate of the difficulty the person is having
- ❖ Always stay positive, people with disabilities are sensitive to the emotions around them
- ❖ Use lots of humour and empathy
- ❖ Obtain input and feedback from the participants, and act on them

III. STRATEGIES FOR ADAPTING ACTIVITIES

When facilitating participation in a group activity, it may be necessary to modify or adapt the activity so that everyone can be included. Part of this process is simply looking at the activities and considering the needs and abilities of the person, then you can decide for the appropriation approach: facilitation, adaptation and modification.

Facilitation: To assist in an interaction or set up a situation to include everyone in the activity

If you are playing a game of floor hockey and you have 2 persons who are having difficulty because one is in a wheelchair and the other has trouble with balance but is mobile, you could team the two persons up by having the individual with balance problems pushing the person in the wheelchair. By doing this you are promoting participation and social interaction as well as self-esteem for both persons.

Adaptation: To change or adjust an activity in such a way that everyone can participate

Partial participation is one strategy that is useful here. For instance, if there is a person who has difficulty with loud noises, you may need to provide a way for the person to interact but still have opportunity to “take a break” if the noise of environment becomes overwhelming.

Modification: To simplify or make the activity easier

Adapting or modifying activities to meet the needs of all participants is simply a matter of creativity. Take a moment to consider the difficulty the person is having and encourage him/her to think about what might make it easier to them. They may have an idea that will not only benefit them but also another person with a similar challenge.

Useful hints:

- ❖ Always stay positive – some people are very sensitive to the emotion around them. If they sense that staff or volunteer is frustrated or having trouble, then you will have even more trouble!
- ❖ Use lots of humour – keep things light. If someone is struggling with an activity such as basketball, use yourself as an example by saying: sometimes it’s frustrating because even though I’m trying my best, I can’t get the ball in the hoop ...
- ❖ Always make sure your expectation is clear – if you find yourself especially frustrated by one person, see if staff or another volunteer can take on more of the interaction with that person.
- ❖ As human beings we do not always get along with each other. If a participant seems to respond less favourable to you, look at your interaction and ask yourself why that might be; remember it is okay to seek assistance from fellow volunteers and RCD staff; and remember sometimes it is simply not a good match.

