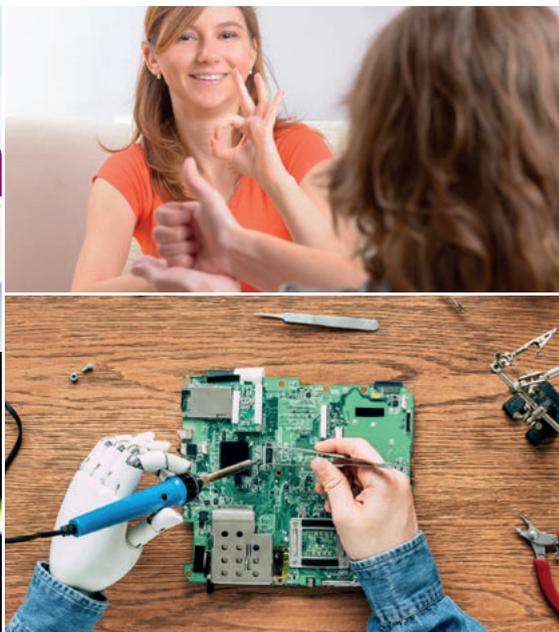




Project co-financed from the Social Fund  
Project no.: POWR.04.03.00-00-0039/18



# GO4 Diversity

Part 2 of the Model

## People with disabilities – a guide for co-workers

# Go4Diversity

Part 2 of the Model

**People  
with disabilities –  
a guide for co-workers**

# Go4 Diversity



Dobre Kadry  
Research and Training Centre Ltd.  
Jęczmienna Street 10/1, 53-507 Wrocław  
Phone: +48 71 343 77 73, +48 71 343 77 74, e-mail: [info@dobrekadry.pl](mailto:info@dobrekadry.pl), [www.dobrekadry.pl](http://www.dobrekadry.pl)

Authors: Beata Pachnowska, Dorota Kwiatkowska-Ciotucha, Urszula Załuska  
Images: Katarzyna Placek  
Translation: Anna Pszkit

All rights reserved. No part of this book, in whole or in its fragments,  
may be reproduced electronically, photographically or otherwise  
without the consent of the publisher and copyright owners.

© Copyright Dobre Kadry. Research and Training Centre Ltd.  
Wrocław 2019



### **About the Go4Diversity project**

The **Go4Diversity** project is an international cooperation project implemented owing to the European Social Fund as part of the POWER Program. The project is implemented in the Polish–Belgian–Swedish partnership, and its aim is to develop effective solutions to increase the motivation of employers to employ people with disabilities in the open labour market.

The guide we provide to you is part of the **Go4Diversity** Model developed in the project. All components of the Model are intended to “normalise” disabilities in the workplace and increase employers’ interest in employing people with disabilities. The results of scientific research conducted in different countries indicate that the success in the professional activation of people with disabilities usually depends on representatives of three groups of stakeholders: people with disabilities, employers and potential so-called “able-bodied” co-workers of persons with disabilities. It is often the attitude of the latter that determines whether a person with a disability finds their place in the workplace, and this attitude depends largely on knowledge of the subject of disability as well as its various shades.

*Our guide is intended for people whose colleague is/may be a person with a disability.*

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE GUIDE:**

- » Teach the basics of etiquette important when dealing with people with disabilities.
- » Provide important information about people with disabilities in general and in the workplace.
- » Show the diversity of people with disabilities and help understand their behaviour and needs in the workplace.
- » Deepen knowledge about people with disabilities, their specificity, needs, possibilities and expectations.
- » “Disenchant” disability, reduce it to an aspect of normal life.

## **ETIQUETTE IN CONTACT WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES BASIC RULES**

- » Use appropriate phrases. Replace the word “disabled” with the term “a person with a disability”. Say “a person with diabetes”, not “a diabetic”, “a person using crutches or a wheelchair”, not “a person tied to a wheelchair”. If this is not necessary, do not point out anybody’s disability. Do not use terms such as “sick”, “a disabled person”, “a sufferer” or “a victim”. If you are not sure how to identify a person, ask.
- » Avoid words that are perceived negatively, such as “a cripple” or “handicapped”.
- » A person with a disability is not a victim – this is someone who suffers and who needs sympathy. Put the person first and treat their disability as a trait that only requires the right prosthesis/medicines or facilities.
- » Be natural in contact with a person with a disability.
- » A person with a disability may require support or help, but always check whether they expect it and to what extent. It is best to ask them directly – if and how to help.
- » Do not check the authenticity of equipment used by people with disabilities. For example, do not check whether a blind person’s white stick really helps them find their way, or whether elbow crutches help a person with a physical disability move around etc.
- » People with disabilities who use wheelchairs, crutches, prostheses or hearing aids treat them as part of their own intimate equipment. By touching or playing with it, you interfere in their personal sphere. You certainly do not want anyone to use your toothbrush or play with it.
- » Remember that there are different types of disabilities. A person with a disability is not only a person moving in a wheelchair or using elbow crutches.
- » Not all disabilities are visible, and not everyone with a disability wants others to know about it. Not everyone also feels disabled even though they really are. Respect this and maintain confidentiality in communication and assistance.
- » Do not make decisions in the name of people with disabilities. They know best what they can and cannot do.

- » Do not be afraid to use common phrases or expressions. A person with visual impairment, like others, will say “goodbye” or “see you tomorrow”. With a person using a wheelchair you can “go for a walk” or “go shopping”.
- » Move the focus from disability to facilities and access for everyone. Do not pay too much attention to disability, but take it into account as appropriate. When thinking about access, do not focus only on people using wheelchairs or only on the blind, but also take into account people of short stature, without arms or with hearing impairment.
- » In direct contact, try to take a position which is comfortable for both sides. For example, when talking to a person in a wheelchair, it is more convenient to do that in a sitting position. If this is not possible, try to keep a proper distance so that the person sitting in a wheelchair does not have to raise their head. Do not crouch down, stand too close or too far, do not force the other person to take an uncomfortable position, but do not take it yourself either.
- » When talking to a person with a disability, including intellectual disabilities and hearing impairment, address them directly, not their attendant or (sign language) interpreter.
- » Do not use the term “deaf-mute” for deaf people!
- » Do not use the third person form when talking about somebody in their presence. This also applies to people with disabilities!
- » Use typical gestures, e.g. greeting with a handshake, also in case of people with disabilities. If there is something they cannot do, they will certainly tell you about it or indicate what they expect (e.g. they will have a handshake with their left hand if they do not have the right one).
- » When a person with a disability is accompanied by a guide animal, e.g. a guide dog, do not touch or provoke it. It is at work, it needs to be focused and has been taught not to interact with others while performing its duties. When not working, the owner may allow you to have contact with it, but always ask first.
- » Try to approach each type of disability in an individual way. Some solutions highly appreciated by people with one type of disability are unacceptable for people with another one.
- » In conflict situations, try to be flexible, patient and open to the point of view of people with disabilities.

## **A CO-WORKER WITH A DISABILITY**

### **A DISABILITY IS A PERSON'S TRAIT, NOT A DEFECT**

Appropriate facilities, medicines or means of communication often allow full functioning and eliminate differences in efficiency. Do you find it hard to believe? Many of us are only able to live, learn and work efficiently because we wear glasses.



*A person wearing glasses also feels their limitations when they take them off.*

## TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE DIVERSITY OF DISABILITY AND DO NOT IDENTIFY IT WITH DISEASE

Only some people with disabilities are people in need of treatment, although most of them need rehabilitation and special assistance.



## **A CO-WORKER WITH A DISABILITY**

### **PEOPLE WITH RECOGNISED DISABILITIES HAVE DIFFERENT RIGHTS THAN OTHERS EMPLOYED UNDER AN EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT**

This is ensured by the applicable law that must be respected by the employer. It includes (with some exceptions):

- » No possibility of working overtime and a night shift.
- » **Shorter working time** (7h / 24h, 35h / week) when a disability is severe or moderate.
- » **An additional 15-minute break for gymnastics** or rest at work at least 6 hours a day. Remember, sitting for hours in a wheelchair is tiring. This additional break is not a whim but a need for rest resulting from the specificity of a given type of disability. The same also applies, for example, to uncomfortable positions for people using elbow crutches, or eye strain for the visually impaired. If you are not convinced, try to be a person with a disability one day. You will see for yourself.
- » **Additional holiday leave:** a person with a severe or moderate disability is entitled to additional holiday leave of 10 working days in a calendar year. The person is entitled to the first additional holiday leave after working in a given place for one year after being recognised disabled in one of these degrees.
- » **Additional days off:** a person with a severe or moderate disability has the right to be released from work for a rehabilitation stay (maximum once a year) for up to 21 working days a year, or specialist tests and treatments without the loss of remuneration. The total amount of additional leave and a rehabilitation stay shall not exceed 21 working days in a calendar year.



*People with a severe or moderate disability may take advantage of additional holiday leave or days off for medical examinations or rehabilitation stays once a year.*

## **A CO-WORKER WITH A DISABILITY**

### **WHEN WORKING WITH A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY, THINK ABOUT THEIR ACCESS TO WHAT YOU USE IN THE WORKPLACE**

In addition to the workplace, you use public areas such as cupboards, a coffee machine, a microwave, toilets, rubbish bins, doors and windows. At each of these places, it is worth checking whether they are accessible to co-workers with disabilities, if they are properly marked and whether information about them has been provided clearly. Make sure you mark entrances, door numbers and escape routes correctly.

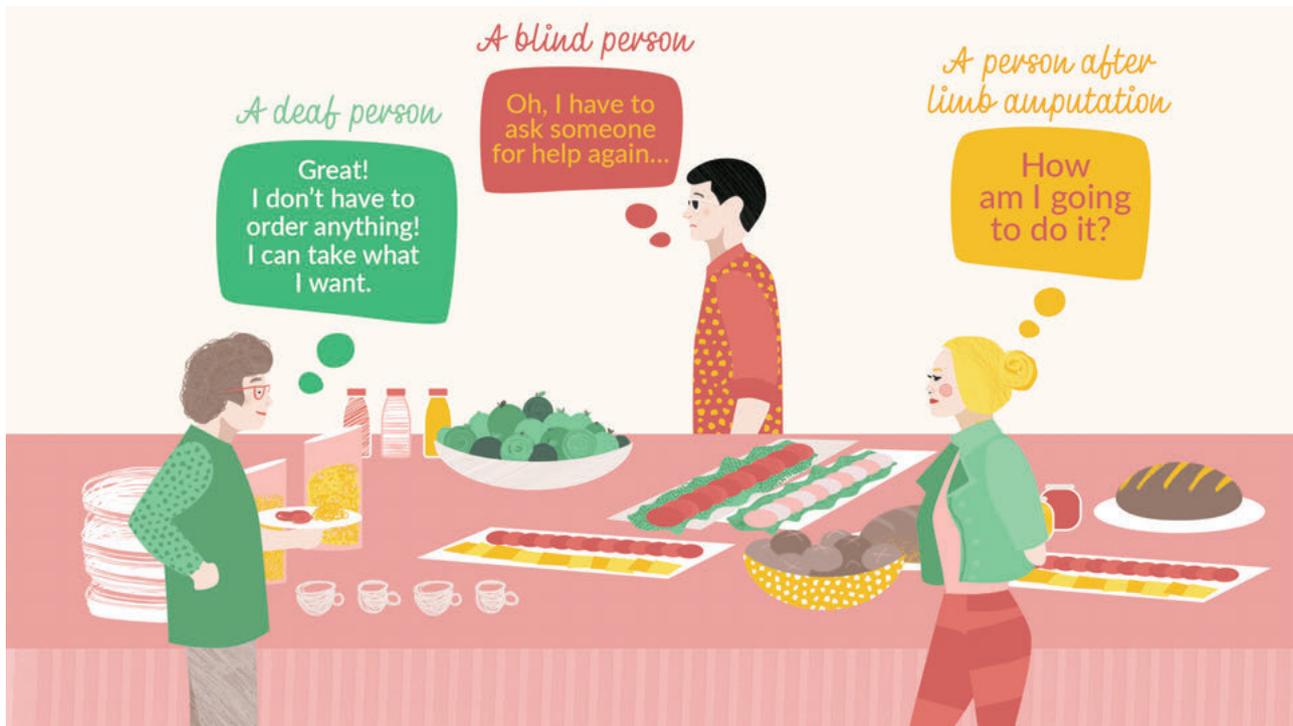


**When organizing meetings, conferences or integration events  
take into account the diversity of not only disabilities.  
Ask! People have very diverse needs.**



**Remember that people using a wheelchair cannot get everywhere. Make sure you place the items they might need within their reach.**

You are organising a conference, a company meeting or you are ordering a joint meal. Check to see if there are people with food allergies among your employees, or if there are restrictions to a place or distance. It is good practice to create a checklist taking into account architectural facilities, visual markings or diet. If in doubt, ask.

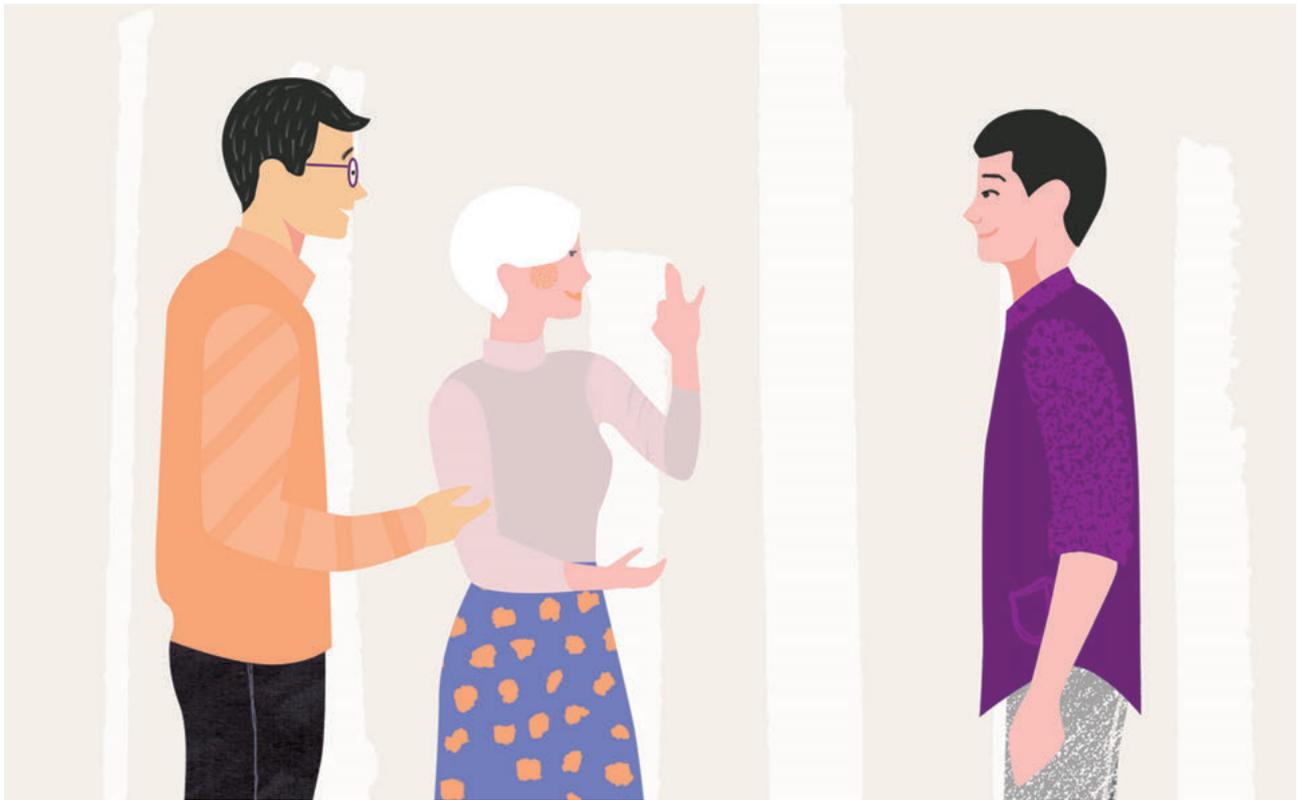


**Disability requires a personalised approach.  
What is well perceived by one group can be a serious barrier to others.**

## **A CO-WORKER WITH A DISABILITY**

### **TYPES OF DISABILITIES DEAF AND HEARING IMPAIRED PEOPLE**

Deaf people are not mute – some of them use spoken language, others sign language, and they also use written Polish. Some read the speaker's mouth really well. Sometimes, however, spoken language is quite difficult to understand. It is worth asking for repetition, using gestures or written language.



***When talking to a deaf or hearing impaired person, look at them, try to speak clearly and slowly, also when a sign language interpreter helps you. Do not raise your voice when dealing with deaf people.***



*Remember, some people who use sign language describe themselves as Deaf (with capital “D”) – they form a separate culture and language group, and they do not feel disabled.*

Sign language has different grammar than Polish, and the Deaf do not always know Polish well. While speaking to them, it is worth using simple grammatical forms, also in written language, and gestures.



*Always address a person with a disability directly, not their attendant or interpreter. Sometimes we do it unconsciously, but it is worth developing this habit as it greatly facilitates communication.*

**While speaking, deaf people tend to make loud noises, touch the interlocutor, or help themselves with gestures.** Such an invasion of a private sphere may be troublesome for hearing people, therefore one should be prepared for that and try to understand it.

**When speaking to a deaf person, determine the preferred and most appropriate way of communication.** To ensure effective contact, always make sure you are noticed. To attract their attention, you can raise your arm, wave your hand or touch their shoulder. You can also use a light signal (e.g. in the production hall).

Do not raise your voice when dealing with deaf people. Rather, try to speak slowly and repeat the words if necessary, or change your statement into a more understandable one.



### **Did you know that:**

All nations have their sign languages. In Poland, as in most countries, there are two sign languages:

- » SJM is **manually coded language** – an artificial language which is a calque of Polish verbal language, a subcode created by hearing people, often incomprehensible to the deaf.
- » PJM is **Polish Sign Language** – a natural language for deaf people, different from Polish. It has its own visual-spatial grammar, making it a multidimensional language.

Among deaf/hearing impaired people, the knowledge of Polish is poor or even very poor. Its level is believed to be A1–A2. For this reason, the range of vocabulary which those people use is limited. When communicating with a deaf/hearing impaired person, speak clearly and avoid complicated or flowery statements.



Make sure the person is listening to you (they know you are talking to them) before you give them any information (tap twice on their shoulder).

When speaking to a deaf person, always face them. Do not type anything on the computer or walk around the room.

Encourage a deaf/hearing impaired person to let you know when there is something they did not hear or understand.

Your face should be in the light. There should be no strong source of light behind your back.



**Remember, deaf/hearing impaired people can communicate in many ways, e.g.:**

- » Use spoken language (depending on the degree of hearing loss).
- » Use sign language (not all people with hearing impairment can do that!).
- » Read speaker's lips.
- » Write on a piece of paper or blackboard (but for many Polish is a foreign language).
- » Write text messages or e-mails.
- » Use instant messengers.



**Deaf / hearing impaired people can communicate in many ways. It is worth asking about their preferred one.**



*All nations have their sign languages - there is no universal one. But the specificity of sign language means that it is much easier and faster to communicate using different sign languages than spoken ones.*



*Sign language is multidimensional and facial expressions play a very important role in it. They indicate, for example, whether an interlocutor made an affirmative or interrogative sentence.*

## **A CO-WORKER WITH A DISABILITY**

### **TYPES OF DISABILITIES BLIND OR VISUALLY IMPAIRED PEOPLE**

People with visual impairment are very diverse – some of them suffer from visual field limitation, some do not see clearly, some are able to distinguish light and shadow, whereas others do not distinguish specific colours. Many of them – even those without vision – have a good sense of direction and the ability to navigate in a familiar environment. Some use white sticks or guide dogs.



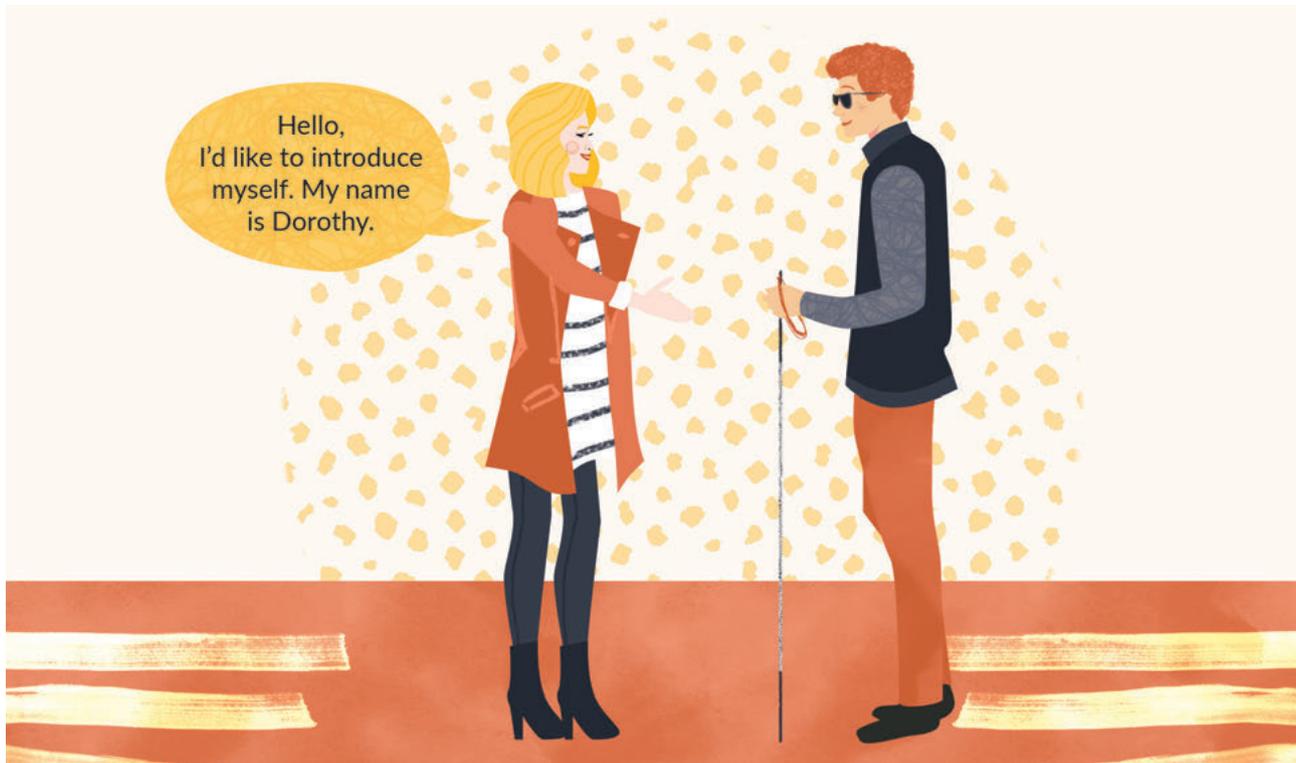
***A blind employee should be informed of changes in the environment.  
Do not change the position of the equipment without informing them about it.***

- » In general, blind/visually impaired people experience the presence of other people around them or see them, but they may not notice their interlocutor staying outside their contact zone. To get the attention of such a person, sometimes you need to tap them on their shoulder, always saying who you are and what your role is (e.g. a colleague, boss, security).
- » A blind person should be thoroughly acquainted with the environment in which they are to stay or work. They need to be shown around and become familiar with it. It is also necessary to inform them about changing the position of equipment. Do not arrange any equipment in passages and do not move the things on the blind person's desk.



*If a blind person asks you to describe what they have on their plate, do that using the clock position e.g. At 12 o'clock you have a pork chop and at 5 o'clock - a salad.*

- » A blind person may need a guide when they enter a new area - you can give them your arm and help them walk through it. It is also acceptable to direct such a person's hand on the back of a chair or handrail.
- » In the event of obstacles or possible injuries, one should give clear directions (do not say "Watch out" but "Stop! Stairs!" or "Watch out for the hole in the pavement").
- » A white stick, just like a wheelchair, is an element of a person's private sphere. Do not move or touch it. When it lies in the passage, ask the owner if it can be moved.
- » Visually impaired people often use their eyesight fairly well, but they may require more readable and larger print or contrasting letters, a larger screen or better light (not very bright). Avoid shiny paper due to light reflections. Determine what facilities can be important and introduce them.



***Say hello to a blind person by shaking their hand and introducing yourself.***

- » Introduce yourself when meeting a blind person, even if you have been friends for a long time.
- » Signal your presence when you enter a room where a blind person sits and inform them when you leave.
- » If you want to address a blind person who is in a group of people, signal that you are talking to them, e.g. by using their name.
- » If you want to shake a blind person's hand, you do not have to wait for his or her initiative – just say “I want to shake your hand.”
- » Describe events which do not involve any sounds.
- » When assisting a blind person, use as many verbal messages as possible e.g. inform them about obstacles encountered on the way, describe the rooms where a person with a disability is for the first time.



*If you are instructing a blind person, be sure to give specific directions which will help them reach their destination effectively without using a visual sense of direction.*

## **A CO-WORKER WITH A DISABILITY**

### **TYPES OF DISABILITIES PEOPLE WITH MOTOR DISABILITIES**

- » The group of people with motor impairment is very diverse in terms of the cause of disability and the level of functioning in everyday life.
- » Limited physical ability may be the result of an accident, illness, brain damage, disease, injuries and deformations occurring within the muscular, skeletal or nervous system.
- » People with physical disabilities are people in a wheelchair, using crutches or a prosthesis e.g. of an upper or lower limb, but also people with osteoarthritis, multiple sclerosis, spinal diseases or short stature.
- » People in wheelchairs may have very different disabilities, and thus different needs, and may require different facilities. Some of them can walk short distances, some use their hands efficiently, while others may have significant four-limb limitations. Some are very independent in moving around, others need help when travelling or getting into a car.
- » However, they always require the right space for themselves, driveways or lifts, free passage in circulation areas and a sufficient amount of space around their car in the car park. Do not block passages, clearly mark the places available and directions on how to get there.
- » When dealing with a person in a wheelchair, do not touch the wheelchair or put your belongings on it. Try to talk to a person in a wheelchair while sitting, keeping eye contact during your conversation.
- » A person using a wheelchair should be given access to the workplace, or the workplace should be adapted to their needs.

***Facilities for wheelchair users will also be helpful for people with short stature.***

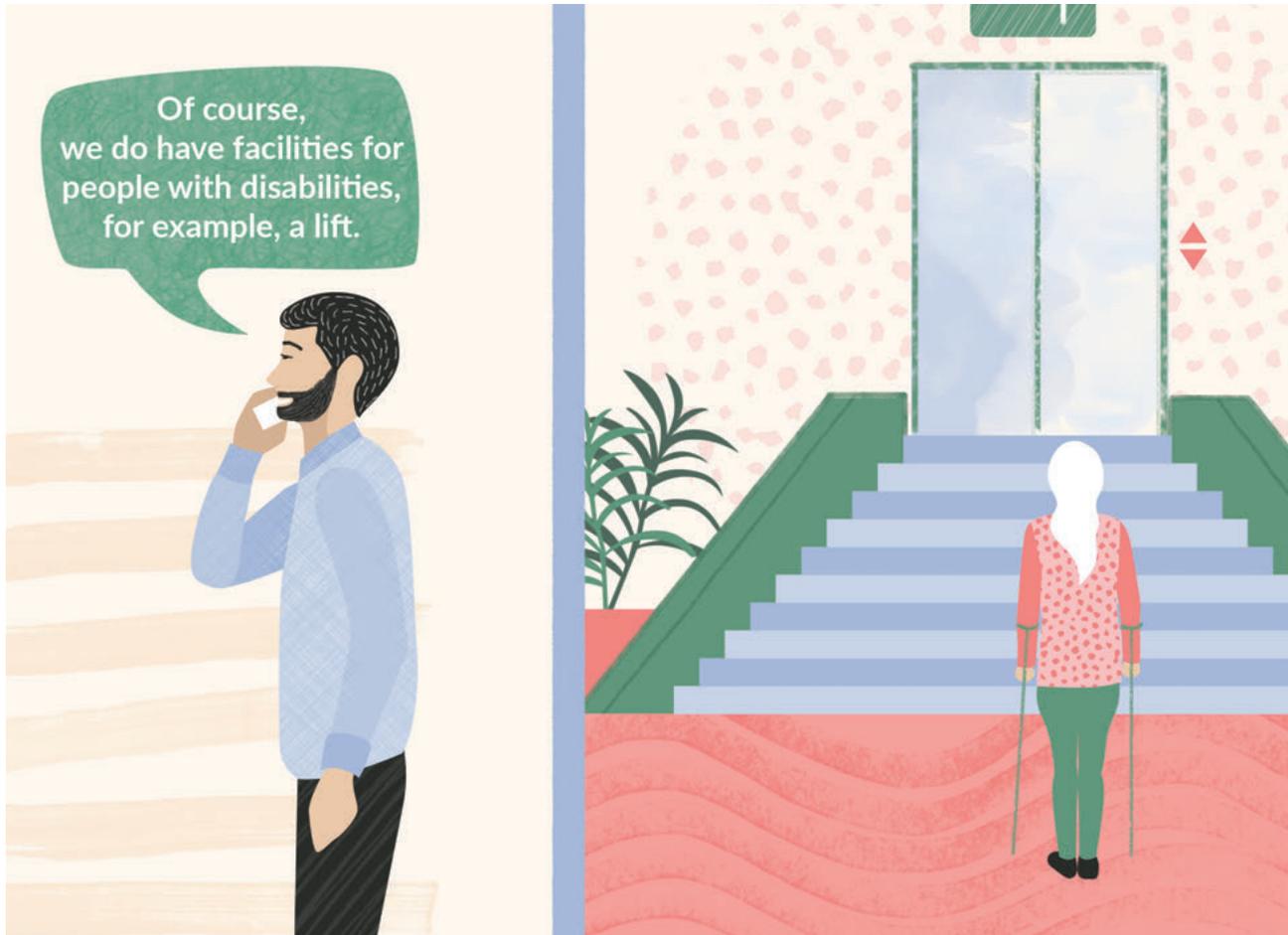


***Remember that people using a wheelchair cannot get everywhere. Make sure you place the items they might need within their reach.***



*Having a lift is not everything. It is worth taking care of other infrastructure elements. What seems accessible to you can be an insurmountable barrier for others.*

- » Provide access to places of daily use – tables, cabinets, office and kitchen equipment, locks, door handles and door release buttons, identification cards, intercoms and light switches.
- » A person using crutches or a walking stick may require additional handrails. If they are not there, your help e.g. giving them your arm, can be useful. Such assistance may also be needed in case of slippery floors or stairs. Ask if anyone needs help before you give it.



*Having a lift is not everything.  
Make sure that access to it is not problematic.*

- » People with motor disabilities using a wheelchair are people, not equipment. Do not treat their wheelchair as a shelf to put your things on!
- » Keep eye contact with the person you are talking to. Do not talk above their head.



*A wheelchair is not a hanger for everyone -  
treat it as a personal item.*



***When talking to a person in a wheelchair, try to take a sitting position and keep eye contact during the conversation.***



*Do not talk above the heads of people with disabilities.  
Try to make each of the interlocutors take a comfortable position.*

## **A CO-WORKER WITH A DISABILITY**

### **TYPES OF DISABILITIES PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES**

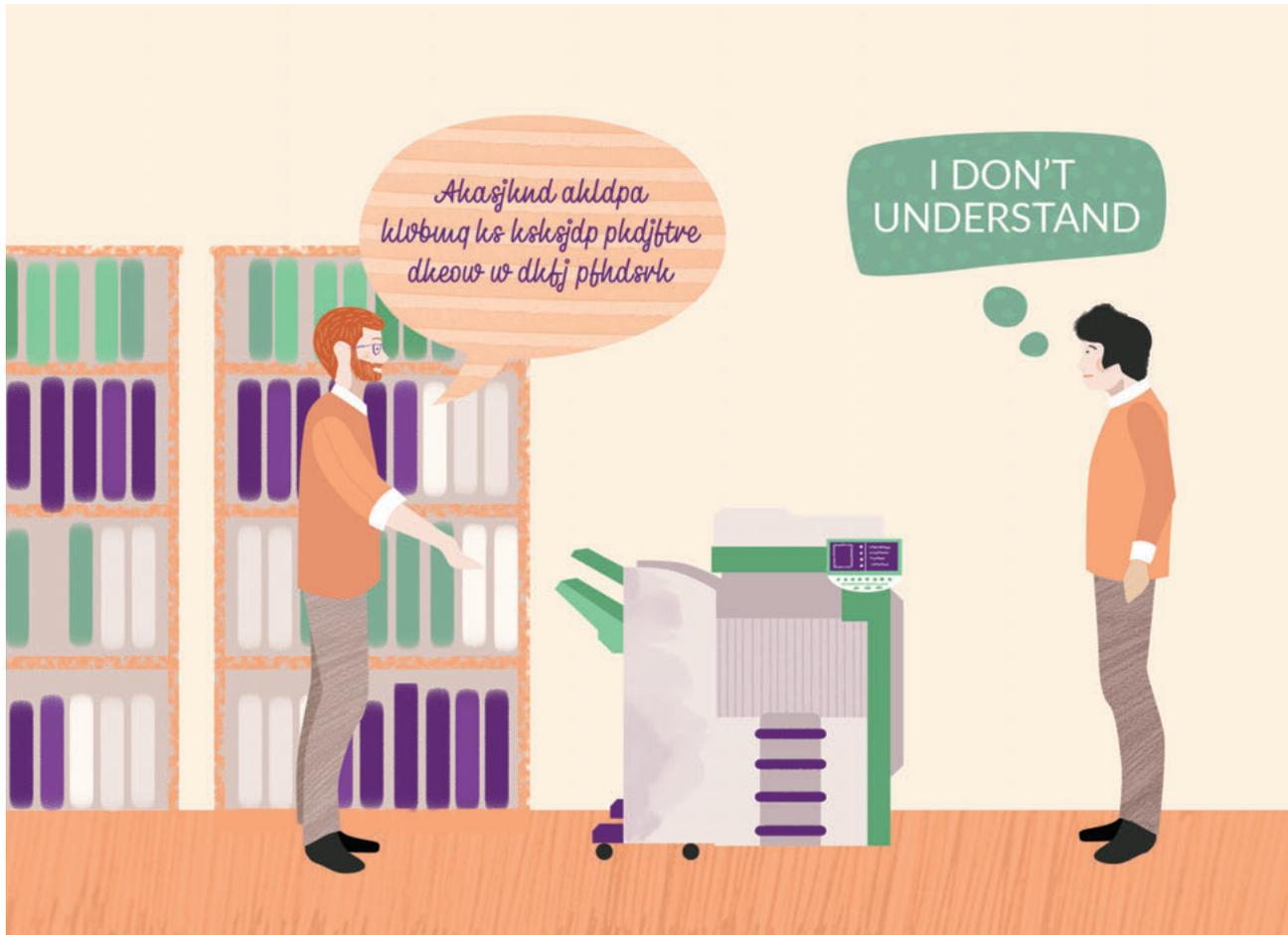
- » Intellectual disability is not a specific disease entity. It is a heterogeneous group of disorders of various aetiologies, clinical picture and course.
- » Intellectual disability more or less limits the fulfilment of social requirements, which applies not only to the cognitive sphere of man but to all spheres of their functioning.
- » By employing people with intellectual disabilities, one can obtain engaged, grateful and dedicated employees and colleagues. At the same time, they are sincere, often fantastic people who live their work and treat their workplace as their second home.
- » However, you have to bear in mind that when employing a person with intellectual disabilities you need to be prepared for everything – both positive and negative situations. Cooperation with such people requires understanding, learning the specificity of their behaviour and predicting possible unusual situations. One should also remember that these people have emotional problems and may cause unusual situations when dealing with colleagues or customers.
- » Three good tips for success include getting to know the specificity of a given disease, patience and an inner desire to give a chance to a person with such a disability.
- » People with intellectual disabilities often act at work and in everyday life in an established and familiar order; remember that changing the environment or order may require some attention and time to get used to that.



***Remember that a person with autism may feel uneasy in new situations.  
Tell them about changes in advance. Do not surprise them.***

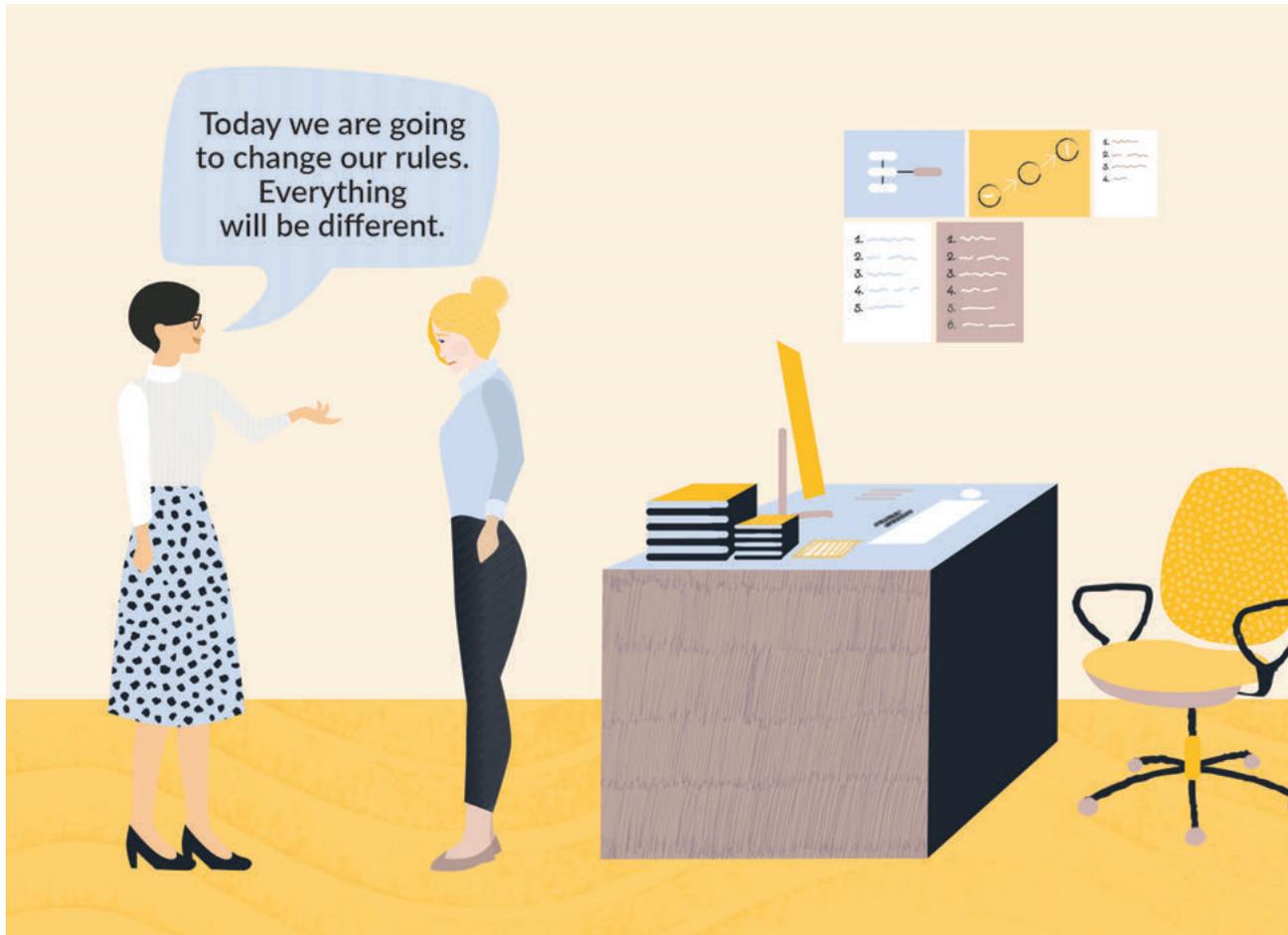
- » Symptoms of anxiety and insecurity may be expressed in the so-called motor mannerisms, e.g. swaying, waving hands, jumping up. One should not pay attention to them; they are not a manifestation of aggression.
- » However, if the motor mannerisms become worse, it may mean that the situation is too difficult for a person with autism; in this case one should suggest moving to a quieter place.
- » In the workplace, it is worth introducing pictograms to mark important machines, devices or equipment. This can help people with intellectual disabilities operate them. It is also a good idea to write different instructions or regulations in a simplified language – this should help people with intellectual disabilities to become acquainted with their content.

- » A lot of attention should be paid to effective communication.
- » Speak clearly and always use “Mr” and “Mrs” forms, unless a person with an intellectual disability clearly asks you to address them by their first name.
- » Do not use childish language or patronise people with intellectual disabilities.
- » Adjust the pace, complexity and vocabulary of your speech to the person you are talking to.



*Use short, clear and specific phrases. Give examples.  
Do not use flowery language.*

- » People with disabilities have their own private sphere. Touching, patting them on their back or grasping their hand without permission can be unpleasant.
- » There can also be moments when a person with an intellectual disability invades your private sphere. If you do not wish them to do so, make it clear.
- » If you do not understand something, ask the person to repeat it.



*People with intellectual disabilities behave at work and in everyday life according to an established and familiar order. If you want to change this order, inform them about it in advance and give them enough time to get used to a new situation.*

- » For people with autism, be friendly and do not impose yourself. Also, do not be discouraged if such a person is reluctant to answer your questions or does not look into your eyes during a conversation.
- » Be patient – you will not always get the answer to your question immediately.
- » Use short, clear and specific phrases. Give examples.
- » Avoid abstract concepts, jokes, irony, ambiguities, comparisons and metaphors.



*People with intellectual disabilities are perfect  
at performing monotonous and repetitive work.*



*It is a good idea to write different instructions or regulations in a simplified language - this should help people with intellectual disabilities to become acquainted with their content.*



**CK**  
**Dobre Kadry**  
Centrum badawczo-szkoleniowe Sp. z o.o.

**Dobre Kadry**  
**Research and Training Centre Ltd.**  
Jęczyńska Street 10/1, 53-507 Wrocław  
Phone: +48 71 343 77 73, +48 71 343 77 74  
e-mail: info@dobrekadry.pl

[www.dobrekadry.pl](http://www.dobrekadry.pl)