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Savoir Vivre Guide For Better Understanding People With Disabilities

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Nr 144 w rejestrze uczelni niepublicznych prowadzonej przez Ministera Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego

WySPA Dostępności

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Publication of the University College of Enterprise and Administration in Lublin as part of the project: „WySPA Dostępności”

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People with disabilities are people who have their families, jobs, interests, likes and dislikes, as well as problems and joys. While disability is an integral part of who they are, it does not in itself define these people. Don't turn them into heroes or victims of disability. Treat these people as individuals.

[Judy Cohn, A practical savoir-vivre guide for people with disabilities, publication adapted by the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Disabled People]

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Introduction

Most of us have been taught from an early age not to look at someone with a disability (it was called "handicapped") because it was rude and unpleasant. We grew up in this fear. This has shaped our mutual contacts. Fear of being hurt has deprived many of us of our freedom and made us learn to heal relationships.

When dealing with people with disabilities, we feel insecure and uncomfortable. We do not know how to behave, we look away, we pretend not to see, we do not know what we can, what is going to happen to us – ask for help, ask about the cause of the disability. We do not want to cause you any trouble.

On the other hand, we want to help. For example, we see a person on a wheelchair, and the internal imperative pushes us to make it easier, to drive him/her, catch the wheelchair, make it possible faster, more efficiently, because ... Exactly. Who exactly do we want to help: a disabled person or ourselves? Because it makes us feel worse, it is not fair that we are healthy, and this person is on a wheelchair / with white cane / crutch (delete as appropriate). Of course, let's not go to extremes. It's not about not helping at all. Yes, everyone who needs help, should receive this help. Everyone also has the right not to take this help.

Everyone has the right to live independently and at a pace that is convenient for him. To function independently. To entertainment, study, work. To go to the university, to the cinema, to the cafe, to the swimming pool on your own, wherever you want. To travel. To life.

This guide has been created so that we can learn how to live, learn and work together. To look at one another and converse. To ask questions and not to be afraid. We – fit and disabled.

Definitions

The following glossary is not a closed catalogue or the only binding one – it is rather intended as a pretext for reflection when using various terms[1].

The Deaf – Deaf written with a capital letter is a person who identifies himself with the cultural and linguistic minority of the Deaf people. Very often he/she does not perceive himself/herself as a disabled person, but as a representative of a minority. He/She is the creator / recipient of the Deaf culture – based on a separate language – in Poland it is Polish Sign Language (PJM).

Deaf person - a person who cannot hear. He uses PJM. A broader concept than the Deaf, because it also describes people who do not identify with the Deaf culture. The determinant of belonging is not a medical issue (i.e. the level of hearing loss), but a utilitarian one – it is a person for whom PJM is the first language. The word "D/deaf" has no negative connotations in the deaf community (see Polish Association of the Deaf).

Deafish – the term most often used by hearing people towards deaf people, rarely used by the latter. Also because it defines a person's situation by some lack – deafness, and not by having some quality.

Hard of hearing – a term used for people who have hearing problems, but their first language is Polish. They use technical solutions that support hearing, subtitles, etc. Most often they do not use PJM.

[1] Guide "How to implement the Accessibility Act" prepared by the Social Cooperative "FADO" at the request of the Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy, Łódź 2019.

Hearing impaired person – a very “technical” term for both deaf and hard of hearing people. It is not actually used in a situation where someone is telling the person. It is in the language of European projects but should be avoided in posters / information materials.

Deaf-blind – a person who has both eyesight and hearing damaged. For exploring the world, he/she uses the sense that is better functioning – so sometimes he/she uses hearing aids, sometimes very strong glasses or magnifiers. Actually, there are not many situations in which a deaf-blind person has a hundred percent lack of vision and hearing in the same time.

Blind – a person who cannot see and has only "feeling of light". He/She collects information by means of hearing and touch. It's a term people use to talk about themselves. It is in common use (see Polish Association of the Blind). Only a small proportion of blind people currently use Braille. Much more often they use ordinary keyboards and screen readers when using computers.

Visually impaired – a person who has damaged eyesight, but it is still the basic or one of the basic methods of collecting information. The differences in seeing shapes, colours, and distance judgment, can be very large.

People with disabilities of the locomotive organs – on a wheelchair, using walkers or orthopaedic crutches. Some people do not use any equipment and their disability is not visible at first glance.

Paraplegics – people who have completely disabled legs and fully functional hands. They usually use wheelchairs and have fully working hands.

Tetraplegics – people with paralysis of all limbs. In some cases, they may use their hands and feet partially, but the range of motion can vary

widely. They often use wheelchairs – both manual and electric.

“Wheelchair man” – colloquial term for a person moving in a wheelchair. Popularized, among others by Mr Marek Sołtys, the president of the Society of Friends of Crazy Wheelchair from Warsaw. Another term for this group of users is the word "wheelchair user", which in turn appears primarily in a sports context.

People after limb amputation – can use all of the above-mentioned technical solutions – wheelchairs, crutches, prostheses, etc.

People with intellectual disabilities – in the past, it was more popular to describe people with intellectual disabilities, now you should not define anyone in this way. Intellectual disability may have a different scope and causes.

Mentally ill people – people whose disability results from diseases of the nervous system. They can function very differently at different moments, depending on the stage and period of the disease.

People with limited cognitive abilities – a term sometimes used for people with intellectual disabilities and mentally ill people.

People with special needs are not only people with disabilities.

Pregnant women – cpregnancy is a period that most women perceive as a period of special treatment – they usually tire more easily, cannot stand for too long, and it is more difficult for them to perform certain activities. It is always a good idea to ask about special needs and to answer them appropriately.

People with children – caring for a dependent person may require additional space, fortunately, playrooms are a more common practice in

the offices. Changing tables will be important for young children.

Seniors – Older people MAY have special health needs. This does not mean, of course, that every senior will need special treatment.
Of course, the rules of universal design will help the most here (read more in the chapter on architectural accessibility), but above all, remember that the way of dealing with matters should be as simple as possible, require as little physical effort as possible and be clearly explained.

People with big luggage – this is just an example, because everyone may have special needs – it results from a specific situation, a specific person in a specific environment.

Definitions concerning services

Lorm alphabet – the transmission of individual characters is carried out by touching points on the hand. Lorm is used for communication with deafblind people.

Braille alphabet – a system of writing signs using six convex points in a different arrangement and read by touch. Less and less often used by blind people due to its replacement with speech synthesis.
Very important at the stage of Polish language education.
Braille is used to write any language that uses the Latin alphabet.

Screen reader – a computer program that recognizes and interprets, and then, using a speech synthesizer, reads what is on the screen of a computer or telephone. It is used by blind and visually impaired people.

Polish Sign Language (PJM) – sign language used by deaf Poles.
It is a full-fledged language, it has all the features of a language.
It is characterized by visual-spatial grammar, that is, blinking a sign in

a specific place gives it an additional meaning (used, for example, to determine time).

Language and Sign System (SJM) – a sub-code of the Polish language. To blink in this way characters from PJM are used, combined with Polish grammar. This way of communication is practically not used by the deaf.

What words should be avoided?

Cripple – a word derived from the Turkish language – once widely used and meaning, in its first original meaning, a person who were injured in the fight.

Invalid – a word derived from Latin – also commonly used, although treated as inappropriate by a large part of the community of people with disabilities.

Deaf-mute – this is a term that deaf people do not like, because it suggests that if you are deaf, you are also dumb – that is, you do not have your own language. And yet deaf people use Polish sign language and speak using their hands, not their mouths.

Efficient differently – a fashionable term in the 1990s, rarely used today.

People with disabilities of the locomotive organs

This group includes people with very different health problems, with different types and severity of disabilities. These are people in wheelchairs, with crutches or a cane, but also people who seem to have mobility problems, but may have special needs. For example, people with cardiopulmonary diseases, obese people or those who have suffered injuries.

Ann is a representative of this group – a person moving on a wheelchair. She will briefly explain how to behave towards person with disability of the locomotive organs.

I am Ann. I am on a wheelchair. It is not easy for me, but I console myself that more and more "is happening" in the subject of accessibility. Each of us uses a wheelchair for a different reason, each has a different degree of disability. We are not the same. Some of us have good hands, some do not. Some people can get out of the wheelchair while others are unable to do so. Some of us, like me, were able to move around with the help of crutches before settling down in the wheelchair.

Don't bend over to say hi. It is best if you assume a position that allows us to make eye contact. It would be good if you sit down, or at least stand a short distance away so that I don't have to bend my head.
It is not convenient even if the conversation does not last long. Imagine you meet several people a day – neck strain guaranteed. If you greet others by shaking hands, do the same with me as well. Regardless of whether my hands are functional, paralysed, or my hands are not fully developed. Much better than if you avoid me, or worse, pulled back at the last minute. If you are not sure if you can give a hand, ask.

When I talk to friends who are not disabled, I know that when dealing with a disabled person, they are afraid to make a blunder. And here is “squaring the circle”. You feel embarrassed, I feel embarrassed – embarrassment breeds embarrassment. If you don't know how to behave, just ask, I will be happy to answer and appreciate that you care about doing the right thing.

Very often I meet people who wander with their eyes while talking to me, do not focus on the conversation; they look beyond me at the distance, not wanting to bother me, or wander with their eyes on my legs (then I wonder what they think, but it is not difficult to guess: "how did it happen that she sitting in a wheelchair", "can she really not walk", "Maybe an operation would help", etc.). So it is best to look into the eyes.

If you want to help – ask if you can. Before you do anything, make sure I need it. People with disabilities do some things more slowly, but that does not mean they cannot cope and they want someone to do it for them. Would you like someone to "help" you by pushing and moving you out of the way, because it will be faster and more efficient this way?
I rather doubt it. But that does not mean I do not need that help.
Each of us, whether disabled or non-disabled, sometimes needs help

and support from another human being. However, it is necessary to act sensitively so as not to deprive anyone of the right to independence. The most important thing, as I have already mentioned, is if you can help, and if so, how. Do not be afraid of it, it is better to hear even a rude "no" (everyone is entitled to a bad day) than not to help.

Main rule: the wheelchair and me are the one. It is an integral part of the man that moves on it. Never hang anything on the wheelchair, do not put anything on it. Just because I am sitting does not mean you can put something on my lap that you do not want to hold. For example, a bag, or a coat. This is not a luggage room! Also, as with any seated person, do not give anything over me. Would it be nice if someone over your head made such stunts? Surely you have been in such a situation more than once when people's behaviour forced you to bow your head so as not to get hit. I can assure you that I am in this situation more often, because I am sitting all the time. Imagine that there are people who are not able to move his head, not to even mentioning about bending.

I do not like it when you push, move, twist my wheelchair without my permission. From your perspective, it is just equipment, for me they are my "legs". Without it I cannot move, just like you without your legs. Additionally, you can damage it by manoeuvring the wheelchair improperly. There are no indestructible things and it is also one of them. Some of them have very delicate and sensitive mechanisms that allow us to freely operate and manoeuvre them. Imagine that you are not the only one irritated with designers of public spaces with the next damaged heels on granite cubes. Unsuitable ground is also a nightmare for us, wheelchair users. Not only because it is harder for us to move on uneven pavements. More than one wheelchair has failed to withstand the shock therapy provided to it by the ground.

Speaking about walks, anticipating your question: yes, it is appropriate to use the words: "Come, come on, let's go ," etc. We use them in a natural way. Well, think what it will look like if you tell me "ride to class, now we have a language course", instead of "go to class". "Let's ride for a walk" instead of "let's go for a walk" suggests a longer journey, for example to an attractive tourist destination.

Tourist attractions, museums, cinemas, theatres and concert halls are often not accessible to us. A driveway, elevator, toilet adapted for us should be a standard, but such amenities are not everywhere. Although, in recent years, a lot has changed for the better, it still remains much to do. The main point is that everyone should understand the sense of such amenities. They are to allow us to live independently, without waiting for often necessary help. So if there is a driveway, do not park your bike there. This bike is a difficult obstacle for me, and sometimes impossible to avoid.

Many publications cite examples of discriminatory black humour.
For example, in one of the offices, the stair lift for wheelchair users is locked so that non-disabled people cannot use it. The key to the lift is at the reception desk on the ground floor, and information about it is attached to the lift on the first floor. Apparently obvious but …

Blind or visually impaired people

Hi, my name is Tomek and I am blind since I was born. To facilitate our contacts, I will present here a short "timetable", how to behave, what to say when meeting a blind or visually impaired person. Firstly, I want to emphasize: we are not all the same. Do not put us in one bag. It is not a collection of the same items with a visual impairment. Each of us is different, just like every human being. Everyone reacts differently in different circumstances, each person has their own preferences, likes, dislikes, habits and customs.

The most important rule: act naturally. Be yourself, and if you do not know something or want to help, ask. What to do in the company of the blind? Speak! It is obvious. Use verbal messages, because for obvious reasons visual perception is unavailable or very limited to us. Also, do not treat us with excessive attention. We do not require special care. I understand that meeting a blind person may arouse fear of improper behaviour, fear that you will be blown or offended. Forget about it, because you will not focus on what is most important, i.e. on a conversation, contact, on a person. But do not be offended, if I refuse to your help proposal. I do not always need it. I want to be independent, I have the right to do so, just like you.

When we meet each other – introduce yourself, and when there are more people in the room – introduce them as well. It is also good that present people also tell anything, for instance “hello” and their names – this will help me to set their location. If you introduce me to the group, introduce us to each other, that way no one will feel uncomfortable or excluded. Say that I am blind - this is not an open secret, nor anything embarrassing. That is a fact, so present it and we move forward.

If you want to shake my hand, let me know first. Tell about it, inform me about your intention. Never catch me suddenly, never pull me. Also, do not be afraid that I will be groping for your hand, touching you on the body. I know what height this hand is usually at. Imagine that I know how tall you are: you told me about it while getting to know your voice, and more precisely – its location.

When entering a room with a blind or visually impaired person, signal your presence. If you are leaving, please report it the same. At meetings, introduce yourself every time, even if we know each other for a long time. At more formal meetings, during the presentation, it is important, in addition to your name, to mark the function you perform. For example, "Hello, I'm Stefan, I'm a colleague from the faculty". Or during a lecture, where a blind or visually impaired person is present, it is important to introduce yourself: "I am X, a lecturer in the department so-and-so", because I cannot see who is saying it and who is he.

Oh, and one more thing. If we are talking and you agree or disagree with what I say, do not nod your head or shake it. I cannot see it. Say yes or no. Of course you can move your head in addition, it does not matter to me. If you talk to me, talk in my direction, turn your face towards me, so I know that you are talking to me. Additionally, say my name if you are addressing me. More than once, when I was with a companion, I noticed that people turned to mine for a companion instead of me. This is not appropriate behaviour, just because I cannot see does not mean that I can not communicate. A blind and visually impaired person does not need an interpreter, we understand perfectly what you are saying to us and we know when you are turning towards us. By the way, a friend who has a guide dog said that someone used to talk to this dog instead of him.

I know you want to help and warn us of the obstacle. But do not shout "attention!" Because I do not know what to watch out for, so I tense up and distract myself. It is enough to say, for example, "chair on the third" or "in two meters on the left, the car is parked on the pavement", etc. The point is that you should describe the obstacle in detail, whether you are approaching the curb or the top of the stairs, or if someone suddenly opened the door, I can run into. Help me to find out about the terrain, inform me if there is a high curb in front of us, which I can trip over, tell me if we reach the crosswalk soon, whether we should turn left or right and for what period of time. Close your eyes and try to walk an unfamiliar or even known route. Bang! Yes, I know, you ran into a wall.

We enter the room. It does not matter whether it is a lecture hall, a classroom or a cafe. Describe the room to me briefly, explaining where what is standing. For example, use the clock system. This is a helpful technique, and it works well both for the description of the room, and for the meal. When setting the food on the table, tell me what hours you sit and what time it is, e.g. “pizza at twelve”, this will help me orientate myself. Describe the way to a regular toilet, not the one for wheelchair users. Ordinary toilets are smaller and for me it is easier to use them: everything is close together. A toilet adapted to the needs of disabled people is ideal for people with mobility impairments, for blind people it is too much space.

Do not describe with your hands, just as the phrase "there" will not be helpful for me. I will sit down by myself, but help me by saying: "give me your hand, I will show you where the chair is" and put my hand on the backrest. At work, at the university, show me around the building and tell me where we are going, what we are passing. It will give me a chance to get some orientation in the field. If you are leaving, do not leave me in the middle of anything but at least against a wall, counter, desk and describe the way to the exit.

Some of us use a cane, others a guide dog. Do not touch the cane, grab it or move it to another place if I have put it away. When dealing with a guide dog, walk on the side where there is no dog. Do not distract the guide dog, he is working hard: at this point he is someone's eyes. And do not suggest to lead it, I guess that is understandable. The dog is stroked only then, when he has time off from work. It is also time for playing with him or for meal.

If we do not have a dog or a cane, we use our hands to balance and examine the terrain. Therefore, by offering your help, offer me a shoulder on which I will support. Do not grab my hand, do not pull: sudden movement can upset my balance and even overturn me. And every time you want to offer help, you will have to touch me. Please, inform about it (I mentioned at the beginning), because such a sudden contact without announcement may be perceived as an attack.

Until recent times, a blind person, was associated with the Braille alphabet. In the 21st century, a lot of dedicated applications, for example, applications for the phone, which convert text into voice generated by the voice synthesizer allows us to do web browsing or reading books. We have photo readers, talking thermometers, colour readers, voiceovers and much more. Today, life for the blind is easier than even 20 years ago. We set up blogs, use online banking, participate in forums, meet people, write e-mails ... We work, learn without being different from sighted people in this regard.

Colour contrast is very important for visually impaired people. Thanks to it, they are able to safely move around a given area and, for example, find a door or safely go down stairs. That is why the regulations require that the edges of stairs in public buildings have contrasting markings and glass doors have contrasting stripes on the panes.

Proper lighting is no less important. It should not be too bright or positioned so that it is reflected in shiny objects and surfaces as it can hurt the eyes. Inscriptions, markings, labels – visually impaired people are able to read large, clear (sans serif) fonts. The best visible text is in white capital letters on a black background.

A lot has changed in Poland. Appropriate legal regulations have been developed, public space is being adjusted, there are more and more tactile paths, specially marked spaces, thanks to which people using a white cane can safely move on sidewalks and inside buildings (these rails on sidewalks that is it). I am very happy about it, because we are finally closer to independence and normality. But the most important thing is to change the way people look at people who find it harder because they have special needs.

Hearing impaired people

Hi, my name is Jola and I have sensorineural hearing loss: I can hear but not everything. Sounds, music, street noise, loud sounds are audible to me, but I have problems with proper speech reception. This can be boiled down to: I can hear you saying, but sometimes I don't understand the meaning of the words you are saying. I don't wear a hearing aid.
In fact, my disability clashes with the most important barriers
– communication and mental.

People who are hard of hearing, i.e. those whose hearing loss is not profound, often use hearing supporting devices, such as hearing aids or cochlear implants. These devices help to function normally, but it is not true the common belief that they make us hear normally. This is a myth, that I would like to debunk at the outset. In addition, most people who are hard of hearing do not wear hearing aids. Some people cannot afford it, others feel bad about them, and still for others hearing aids do not improve the quality of life.

Therefore, a clear message is very important. When dealing with a hearing impaired person, speak clearly, look at the interlocutor and do not cover your mouth. I am often asked if I am lip-reading. Actually no, but the explanation is complicated. Simply put: most sounds are made inside the mouth, but looking at the mouth helps you understand speech. So speak out loud, but don't shout. Be clear, but don't over-articulate, it will only make it harder to understand. Ideally, you should speak a little slower and a little louder. Do not chew gum, do not eat.

People are very often impatient. When I ask to repeat again and each time I get an incomprehensible message from an increasingly irritated person, I just pretend to understand and smile. Consequently, there is no agreement. So don't get upset, I don't do it on purpose, I just don't understand what you are saying and the more I want to hear it, the more it fails. Please repeat, but with different words. If you don't understand what a hearing impaired person with a speech impairment said, ask. Ask to repeat. It is useless to pretend you understand and nod.

It is quite difficult for a deaf person to be sociable. Everyone then speaks one through the other. This also applies to creative activities, various types of brainstorming or other exchanges of views. We are not able to separate information spoken simultaneously. They merge together and instead of focusing on the problem or the conversation, we spend all our efforts on straining the information. If there is a hearing impaired person in the group, try not to all speak at once. Ideally, whoever speaks should signal by, for example, raising his hand. Sometimes the course of the discussion needs to be summarized to the hearing impaired person.

Sometimes the surroundings are not favorable. Rooms with poor acoustics (such with reverberation, rumbling), accompanying noise, buzz during conversations, background music, and even the sound of working computers. You do not pay attention to this hum, for some of us it is another disruption of the reception of the message. If possible, try to talk to the hearing impaired person in a quiet room.

Deaf people are very different people. Some, like me, with mild disabilities, can function normally in society, albeit with some limitations. Others, cannot live at all without hearing aids, and there are also others with whom exchanging information can be complicated because their speech is sometimes slurred. This disability is invisible, so very often a hearing impaired person, especially a person who does not wear hearing aids, or a deaf person at all, is treated as an intellectually disabled person. Because this person doesn't understand what is said to her.

I did not always know that I am hard of hearing, but this knowledge, paradoxically, helped me a lot in my studies. It is difficult for a hearing impaired person to focus on the course of the lecture and take notes. Not everyone knows about it, that's why I informed the lecturers about my disability, asked them to use a microphone during the lectures, in addition, I recorded each lecture so that I could listen to it again. Thanks to this, I was able to prepare for the exam.

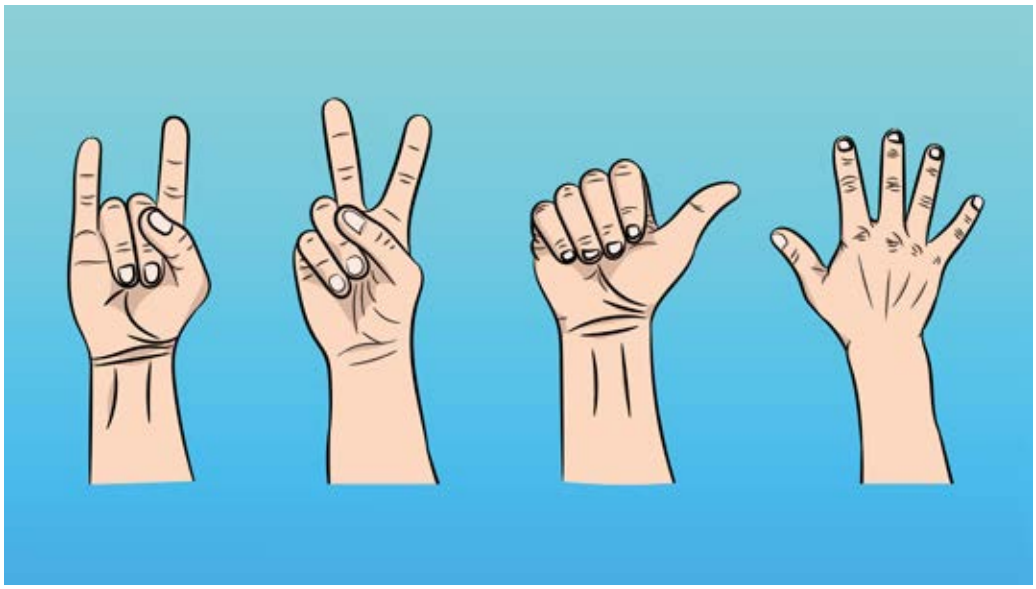
Deaf people

My friends sometimes ask me about correctness. How to speak: not hearing or deaf? Certainly not "deaf-and-dumb" I reply.
The brave ones, usually at social gatherings, ask about other matters, but are usually blocked, they are ashamed, so I willingly agreed to appear in this guide.

My name is Krzysiek and I am deaf. I am not "deaf-mute" because I am not dumb: I speak, write, communicate, express my thoughts in every way available to me.

At the outset, I would like to emphasize: Polish is a foreign language for me, it is my second language. Same as for you, let's say English or Latin. Most of us learn speech in speech therapy offices, some do better, others do not. The written form of the Polish language is also different due to the complicated grammar.

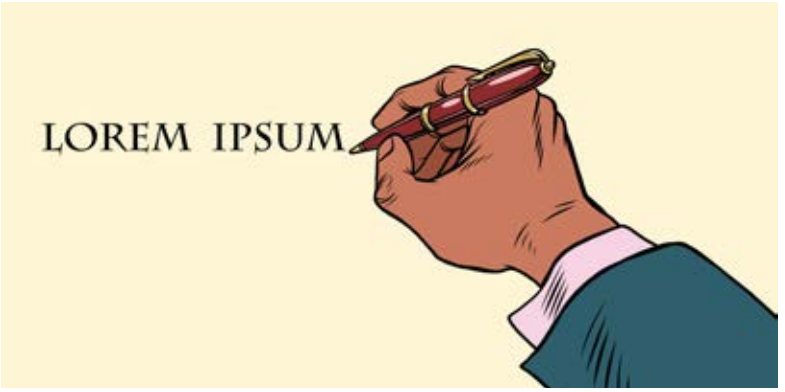
The first and basic language for deaf people in Poland is Polish Sign Language. It is a completely different language than spoken Polish, it has a different syntax. For this reason, we make grammatical and lexical mistakes, just like foreigners learning Polish, which often surprises people. Now you know why.



My friend, a freelance graphic designer, also deaf, noticed that she works better and has more orders from companies and people from outside Poland. We still believe that deaf people have, to say the least, reduced intellectual performance. This is a total mistake. Deaf does not equal stupid. It is all the fault of communication and cultural barriers, and above all the lack of education, understanding and knowledge about, for example, why we make mistakes when writing in Polish.

Now I will answer the question: deaf or hard of hearing. Both forms are correct. You may find the word Deaf, which spelling starts with capital letter. What does it mean: (D) Deaf is the name of a cultural and linguistic minority. In Poland, it is Polish Sign Language. Belonging to the Deaf Culture is not related to or determined by the degree of hearing loss, but comes from our sense of the identity of being Deaf. We accept it, we are proud of it. Our symbol is a butterfly, which, like us, has no sense of hearing, and the colour is turquoise, which means hope, trust and self-confidence.

How to communicate, how to behave in the company of a deaf person? Communication requires making eye contact, that's where you should start. How to establish contact? There is no point in calling for obvious reasons. For example, you can wave your hand (vertically, from top to bottom, because by waving horizontally you are making a goodbye gesture). You can also pat around the shoulder (do not tap the head, neck, anywhere other than your arms and shoulders). Don't pat my shoulder while eating. If the situation requires immediate contact, hit the table with your open palm. Sensitively. It is also a good method in class, especially if there are more deaf people. In a room with more Deaf people, you can also turn the light on and off. In order to get the attention of a friend, you can throw a ball of paper, a soft pillow, but remember, aim for the legs. However, it is not appropriate to attract the attention of a stranger or a superior in this way.



If you do not understand what I am trying to tell you, ask me to write it down. If you don't have a pen and paper, make a simple writing gesture. You can also ask, I will repeat once more. Of course, conversations are easier if we have a sign language interpreter on hand. But remember, it's very important. If you are talking to a Deaf person and the conversation is being interpreted by a sign language interpreter, do not turn to the interpreter. Speak directly to the person you are talking to.

If I do not understand what you are saying and ask you to repeat it, repeat clearly, at a normal pace and do not cover your mouth.
Don't speak louder, it doesn't make sense: I won't hear you anyway.
In closing, if you don't know something, or if you're curious and want to ask me a personal question, just do it.

People with mental disorders

Hi, it's Beata. I have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. This in no way excludes work, learning or study. Learning as such, or acquiring knowledge, has never been a problem for me. The problem is that in my illness it functions like a metronome: my mood/behaviour changes from time to time, as I once read in a newspaper. I like a different comparison, to a sine wave. Phases of euphoria alternate with phases of depression. Up, down, in waves, it goes on until doctors find the right set of drugs that will normalize these phases.

We do everything so that our disability was not visible, it is a specific type of disability that does not show any external signs. It is very difficult to talk about your illness. Each of us is afraid of rejection, discrimination and stigmatization. Nobody wants to live with the label of "crazy", because let's face it, mental disorders are not perceived positively.

You may not know at all how many people around you experience mental health crises. Depression is a very common case. Many people suffer from it, we have all heard about suicide deaths of famous people, but still people suffering from it are not treated seriously by their environment. There are frequent cases of various types of anxiety disorders, which include, for example, social phobia or difficulties in coping with examination stress.

What would I expect from you? If you notice a change in my way of being or behavior, don't do anything special. Be natural with me as you have been until now, but with more patience. If you think the problem is serious, don't tell everyone, a collective discussion about me behind my back will definitely not help me. Ideally, you should seek advice from the Disabled Persons Office. Each university, including WSPA, has developed standards of conduct, and solutions that support students experiencing mental health crises. I may not be able to do it myself. In the stage of severe depression, ordinary affairs are separated by a huge insurmountable gulf, I cannot cope with the simplest activities. Therefore, any help in such a situation, offered with tact and discretion, is very important.

Different faces of disability

Disability is a very broad concept. It may be a visible disability, an example of which is, for example, a motor disability, this group includes deaf and blind people. Disability may also be imperceptible at first glance, we do not know that the person is hard of hearing, we have no idea that our friend is depressed. Disability can be something as "minor" as problems with walking, with the spine, for example caused by a leg that is a few centimeters shorter. And it can also be a complete inability to live independently.

The group of people with disabilities includes people with cerebral palsy, people with Tourette's syndrome, people suffering from epilepsy, people with mental retardation, learning disabilities, traumatic (or acquired) brain injury.

A person with a disability is not the same as a person who has a disability certificate. Pregnant women, elderly people, obese people, convalescents, seriously ill etc. are also not fully functional. Their efficiency is also more or less limited, sometimes it will decrease, but sometimes not. Let us remember that this catalogue is not closed and it is not true that it does not concern us. Therefore, please act with tact and empathy.

Students with disabilities are young people just like you. Treat them just like all colleagues. Don't just look at them through the prism of their disability! People with disabilities live actively, study, play and meet friends just like everyone else. Sometimes they just need some help from us, the able-bodied. What kind of help? Just - ASK, ASK AND ASK AGAIN!

Conclusion

It is estimated that there are approximately 5.5 million people with disabilities in Poland. This is 14 percent of the population, i.e. every seventh Pole is disabled.

According to the National Census conducted in 2002, there are almost 5.5 million disabled people in Poland. Of this number, about 4.5 million are legally disabled people, i.e. people with a valid certificate of disability. This means that, depending on the definition of disability, in Poland, disabled people constitute from 11% to 14% of the population. It is not known what percentage of people with mobility impairments are; it is assumed that there are about 10% of the total number of disabled people. This number grows, if we assume that the mobility disability affects the majority of our country's inhabitants with age.

People with disabilities are less educated than the rest of society. In 2010, people with secondary education accounted for almost 34% of the disabled population; in the case of non-disabled persons, this percentage is 54%. More than 6% of the disabled have higher education; among non-disabled people it is over 19%[2].

From year to year, Polish universities better and better adapt to the needs of disabled people. Movement problems and other bodily dysfunctions are no longer an obstacle to study. In 1999, there were less than two thousand students with disabilities at Polish universities. By 2014, this number had increased more than fifteen times. Various types of funding and scholarships help people with disabilities to

[2] https://www.tea.org.pl/userfiles/file/Seminaria/Niepelnosprawnosc_%20ruchowa_PTodys_TEA.pdf [Dostęp: 17.07.2020]

obtain higher education. The most important is the "Active Self-Government" program, under which you can apply for coverage costs of tuition fees, travel to the university, purchase of books or learning equipment.

Where to go for help? It has already become a standard to set up Offices for Persons with Disabilities at universities or to appoint Rector's Plenipotentiaries for Persons with Disabilities. Their aim is to enable students with disabilities to fully participate in the educational process, as well as in social, scientific and cultural life. They also support students in solving their problems at the university and represent their interests in the academic community. It is in such units at the university that you should look for information about the conditions of studying for people with disabilities and ask about all the issues that seem problematic[3].

[3] https://www.integralia.pl/porada-kandydat/studia-osoby-z-niepelnosprawnoscia/

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