

A woman in a wheelchair and a woman pointing at an interactive map display in a stone building. The woman in the wheelchair is wearing a green hoodie and blue jeans. The woman pointing is wearing a teal jacket and purple leggings. They are standing in front of a stone wall with a clock and an arched doorway. A large green circular graphic is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Effective Communication

for Diverse Visitor Needs

Communicating Effectively

There are some great basic principles that will help in all your visitor interactions:



Always address the person who addresses you.



Focus on the person or people you are communicating with.



Provide a clear welcome.



Introduce yourself.



Ensure that you can be seen and heard clearly.



Use open body language.



Killua Castle, Guided Tour, Co. Westmeath

Photo Credit: Brian Connolly

Chapters

1 Communicating Effectively

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Communicating Effectively

Remember that your visitor is, first and foremost, a person like you, your friends and family. Show respect and empathy, and always treat people as you would like to be treated.

Visitors will appreciate clear and friendly communication with people who approach them as individuals and who demonstrate respect, interest, warmth, and a helpful attitude.



Always address the person who addresses you.

If a carer or companion speaks on a person's behalf, be sure to make eye contact with both of them, and acknowledge, welcome and chat with both people throughout the conversation.



Focus on the person or people you are communicating with.

The person or the group in front of you needs to be at the centre of your attention for the whole time you are dealing with them. Don't multi-task and manage interruptions carefully. If you are dealing with a group, be sure to share your focus fairly. Avoid addressing yourself solely to the most vocal/senior person and help everyone to feel included.



TOP TIPS

Help everyone to feel included!

Chapters

- 1 Communicating Effectively

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Communicating Effectively



Provide a clear welcome.

You can provide a great welcome through warm eye contact, a smile, and the words you use at the start of your conversation. Together, these signals will demonstrate that you are open to hearing what the visitor needs. Simple phrases, like:

I'm glad to see you

Hello!



Introduce yourself.

Let the person know who you are. The visitor may need to be reminded of your name later, but sharing your name at the outset is friendly and helps to personalise your chat with them. A simple introduction is enough:

My name is It's nice to see you all today



Oyster tasting, Gleninagh Pier, Co. Clare

Photo Credit: Luke Kwiatkowski

Chapters

1 Communicating Effectively

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Communicating Effectively



Ensure that you can be seen and heard clearly.

When you are communicating with little people or people who are using low wheelchairs, you may need to move outside of your desk and find a suitable table where you can carry out your conversation or complete actions such as signing documents. Loud noises can be distracting for many visitors, and a quiet environment and good lighting can also be really helpful for visitors with autism or speech, visual, or hearing impairments.



Use open body language.

So much of human communication relies on the non-verbal signals we create through our body language. Open body language can put your visitor at ease, helping them to become confident that you are eager to provide support.

There are a number of open body language signals you can use:

- Face directly towards the person or group.
- Keep your arms and legs uncrossed to avoid looking defensive or uninterested.
- Look at and lean towards the visitor to show you are focused on and interested in them.



TOP TIPS

Always show respect and empathy.

Chapters

1 Communicating Effectively

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Communicating Effectively

Communication approach

- R** Respect should be shown to the visitor and to you.
- E** Everyone's needs and comfort should be supported.
- S** Settings shape communication, consider factors like facilities, lighting, and noise.
- P** People have diverse communication styles and needs which need to be catered for.
- E** Empathy matters, treat all visitor queries and complaints with understanding.
- C** Connect with openness, warmth, and care.
- T** Take your time to support and contribute to the visitors' overall experience.

Chapters

- 1** Communicating Effectively

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Communication Preferences

There are lots of reasons behind people's different communication styles:



Hidden disabilities



Speech impairments



Forms of address



Cultural differences



Fluency



Hill of Uisneach, Co Westmeath

Photo Credit: Nomos Productions

Chapters

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Communication Preferences

Communication Preferences

While general principles are a great starting point for good communication, it is important to respect people's individual communication styles and preferences.

Pay attention to your visitor's tone, pace and comfort levels as a conversation progresses. Following the visitor's lead can help you to ensure an interaction is positive for everyone involved.



TOP TIPS

Pay attention to your visitor's tone, pace and comfort levels.



Hidden disabilities

Some visitors may need time to digest individual pieces of information or require an extra minute or two to process and respond to questions. Other visitors might find plain language easier to understand.



Speech impairments

Always allow a person to finish what they are saying without cutting in or guessing their meaning. If you need to clarify anything, short questions that require a short answer can be helpful. Remember not to judge the intelligence of a person by the way they speak – people who have speech impairments do not necessarily have learning difficulties.

2 Communication Preferences

Communication Preferences



Forms of address

Listen to how visitors talk about themselves and the people in their group and mirror their language. When you respect the ways, people refer to their own disabilities and their preferences around naming and pronouns, you establish a foundation of trust which is the basis for good communication.



Cultural differences

There are all sorts of differences in how people across the world communicate. These can affect how often people use personal names, how formal people's language is, or even how close they would like to stand to you during a conversation. Paying attention to your visitors' preferences and their styles of communicating can help you to make each interaction as comfortable as possible.



Leahy's open farm, Midleton, Co. Cork

Photo Credit: Glasseye

2 Communication Preferences

Communication Preferences



Fluency

This can be an issue for visitors, from within Ireland and beyond, who may not be using their native language. Listen carefully and use a visitor's own language choices as a guide for the words you use, the length of your sentences and the pace of a conversation.



Wild Food Mary, Foraging, Birr, Co. Offaly

Photo Credit: Sonder Visuals

Recap and adapt

Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so and remember visitors may sometimes pretend to understand you.

It can be very helpful to offer a recap to summarise helpful information and invite questions to ensure that everyone is happy.

By adapting your communication style to suit your visitor's needs, and recapping to make sure your interaction has been useful, you can ensure that your day-to-day interactions with visitors are positive and effective for all.

Chapters

2 Communication Preferences

Handling Enquiries

How to deal with enquiries:



Manage the conversation

- Personalise the interaction
- Keep the conversation on track
- Use open questions
- Seek further detail
- Ensure accuracy
- Watch and listen
- Be honest
- Ask for help
- Give clear directions
- Supplement with written information
- Anticipate access issues
- Check
- End each interaction positively



Avoid judging



Castlecomer Discovery Park, Co. Kilkenny
Photo Credit: Glasseye

Chapters

3 Handling Enquiries

Handling Enquiries



Manage the conversation

Personalise the interaction

As you deal with a person, use their name, if they have shared it with you:

So, James you will be staying in room 345.

Keep the conversation on track

Where appropriate, engage the person with general conversation:

Is this your first visit to...?

Have you driven far?

But don't forget to keep the conversation focussed purposefully on the visitor's needs.



National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts Museum, Collins Barracks, Dublin City

Photo Credit: Glasseye

Chapters

3 Handling Enquiries

Handling Enquiries

Use open questions

Words like **how**, **what**, **tell**, **explain**, and **describe**, give the visitor time and space to express their query:

How can I help you today?

Any specific issues I can help with?

Seek further detail

If you're not clear about what the visitor needs, ask them to repeat their request or provide you with more detail:

Which car space are you concerned about?

Are you looking to find out if there is a hearing loop at the venue?



Fota House, Co. Cork
Photo Credit: Glasseye

Handling Enquiries

Ensure accuracy

Repeat what you have heard to ensure you have correctly interpreted the information or query shared with you.

You want to know what the gluten free lunch options are today? Is that correct?

You'd like to know if our local park has an autism friendly playground. Is that right?



TOP TIPS

Don't be afraid to ask questions!

Watch and listen

Throughout your interaction, watch and listen so that you can pick up any non-verbal information and cues that will help you understand a visitor's point of view and their experience.

- A frown might mean that a person does not fully understand you.
- Lip biting can signal that someone has a question to ask.
- Tone of voice might help you decided between two different meanings – for instance, "oh!" may indicate surprise or relief if it sounds high-pitched compared to other responses, or it could indicate disappointment if it is delivered in a tone lower than a person's natural speaking voice.

Be honest

If you are asked something, but you do not know the answer, be honest about that, and choose a helpful course of action.

Chapters

3 Handling Enquiries

Handling Enquiries

Ask for help

If you need to, ask a colleague, a manager, or even a search engine, but, first, let the visitor know that you are working to solve their problem.

I'm sorry. I don't know. I will try to find out now.

I'm sorry. I don't know. I will try to find out and come back later.



TOP TIPS

If you don't know, be honest!

Give clear directions

Let the visitor know where they will find the information they need.

The restaurant is down that hallway. Use the first door on the left.

The local tourist office is on Castle Street. That's...

Be careful to only use clues that will make sense to people who are not familiar with your building or area.

Supplement with written information

Where possible, supplement directions and other information with written materials. A local map or leaflet can aid understanding and support a person's experience throughout their whole visit.

Chapters

3 Handling Enquiries

Handling Enquiries

Anticipate access issues

When you are giving directions, be aware of potential access issues in your facility and the challenges they may pose for the visitor.

- Will the visitor be able to safely access the place you are sending them?
- Is the hallway wide enough for a wheelchair/pram?
- Might their walker slip on a wet floor?
- Is the tourist office open today, at this time? Would a phone call to the tourist information office be an easier option?



TOP TIPS

Be aware of any access issues in your facility.



Irish Military War Museum, Collon, Co. Meath
Photo Credit: Harry Rhys Thomas

Chapters

3 Handling Enquiries

Handling Enquiries

Check

Check that the visitor has what they need before your conversation with them ends.

Did I explain that OK?

Can I do anything else for you?

Is there anything else you'd like to know?

End each interaction positively

A smile and a positive comment can be used to signal a polite end to the conversation:

You're welcome. Enjoy the day. I hope the weather holds up for you!



Avoid judging

No enquiry should be too large, too small, or too awkward for you to deal with in some way.

A visitor is relying on you to enhance their experience, and an encouraging, helpful response can play an important role in their day.



Clara Bog, Visitor Centre, Nature Reserve, Co. Offaly

Photo Credit: Offaly County Council

Chapters

3 Handling Enquiries

Offering Help

How to offer help:



Offer practical assistance



Avoid making assumptions or passing judgement



A visible disability is not a request for assistance



Invisible disabilities may not be flagged



Rathfarnham Castle, OPW, Co. Dublin

Photo Credit: Sonder Visuals

Chapters

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Offering Help

Offering Help



Offer practical assistance

Sometimes, you can offer thoughtful support by anticipating an immediate need. For example, a family with a pushchair might appreciate being told where highchairs or a family changing facilities can be found.

Meanwhile, an elderly person may appreciate it if you offer of a chair while they wait to be served, whether or not they are using mobility assistive equipment. A chair with arms might be appreciated by someone who is using a temporary walking aid, like a crutch, too.



Avoid making assumptions or passing judgement

It is good to be looking out for opportunities to help, but if you offer assistance and someone says "No!", respect the answer. It is best to avoid making assumptions about what the visitor needs.



Island Discovery,
Erne Water Taxi Tours, Co. Fermanagh

Photo Credit: Rob Durston

Offering Help



A visible disability is not a request for assistance

Remember, situations that look tricky to you are not necessarily difficult for the people involved. For example, a parent confidently exploring a space with a guide dog and a toddler may not appreciate being offered support they do not need. A visible disability is not, in itself, a request for help.



Invisible disabilities may not be flagged

Be careful not to assume that a person has no additional needs because you cannot see them, or the person does not announce them to you. Being open and responsive to all customers is the best way to ensure you offer support appropriate to each individual.



TOP TIPS

Do not assume that a person has no additional needs.

Chapters

4 Offering Help

Addressing Complaints

Complaint management

- L** Listen
- E** Empathise
- A** Apologise
- R** Resolve
- N** Nurture



TOP TIPS

Avoid passing blame.



The Address Connolly Hotel, Dublin City
Photo Credit: Katie Quinn

Chapters

5 Addressing Complaints

Addressing Complaints



The Little Museum of Dublin, Co. Dublin

Photo Credit: Tony Pleavin



How to handle complaints

It is important to apologise for and empathise with poor experience. When someone complains, listen carefully, make sure you have understood and noted the issues that arose, and avoid defensiveness or passing blame.

Identify any immediate ways you can remedy the situation, and let the person know that their complaint will be passed on to management and will be treated seriously.

When a person knows that complaints are acted on and are used to support continuous improvement, they may well feel happy to return or recommend your business to others in future.

5 Addressing Complaints

Inviting Feedback



Gathering feedback

Invite feedback on your interaction, and make sure there are mechanisms for the visitor to share their views during their visit, where possible.

Don't wait for complaints, during a visit on or on review sites, to highlight areas where communication or the overall experience could be improved. To gather feedback, check at the end of an interaction that visitors are satisfied.

It is a good idea to include questions about communication and accessibility in end-of-visit questionnaires or post-visit emails. It can also be helpful to display invitations for feedback during a visit, to gather small insights into all aspects of your business' performance.

When feedback is received, either positive or negative, make sure it is recorded in some way so that visitors' insights can be acted upon.



TOP TIPS

Don't wait for there to be complaints, invite feedback.

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6 Inviting Feedback

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Monitor & Improve



Further queries

If you have any specific access/ participation needs or comments that you would like to discuss or share, please contact Fáilte Ireland's Inclusive Tourism Team on inclusivetourism@failteireland.ie and they will be happy to help you.



Hill Top Treks, Co Dublin
Photo Credit: Nomos Productions

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7 Monitor & Improve

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Effective Communication for Diverse Visitor Needs

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