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## How do I help someone with a disability, and their carers

### How to care for someone with a disability

We are instructed to care and love one another (John 13:34), and to comfort one another and share their burdens (1 Thessalonians 4:18). When we are kind and generous to those who are incapable of repaying us, we are being kind and generous to the Lord, as in Matthew 25:40 Jesus says, "Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these brethren, ye have done it unto me".

The most important thing to remember when we interact with people with disabilities is that they are individuals, just like you and me, they feel the same emotions as we do, but may show them differently, they also still have personal interests and hobbies, goals, dreams and desires. When we interact with people with disabilities, we need to focus on their abilities, not their disabilities. People with disabilities are unique individuals who have a wealth of knowledge, skills, talents, interests, and experiences. Remember, people with disabilities may do things in different ways than people without them however, they can achieve the same outcome, most of the time.

**See the Person First** - Think of the person first, not their disability. Don't shy away from people with disabilities. If you haven't spent time with someone who has a disability, it might be a very confronting, you might feel unsure about how to best approach them. If you find yourself struggling with any interaction, try and put yourself in their shoes. Treat everyone as you would like to be treated. You don't need to change your personal behaviour when interacting with someone who has a disability. You need to still speak as you would anyone else at your usual pace, volume and tone, you just need to relax and just be yourself. If communication is impacted by their disability, be flexible and find out what works for them.

**Ask Questions** - There will come a time when you might be unsure how to interact or even help someone living with a disability. Rather than making preconceived judgements or assumptions on what a person with a disability might need, ask them what makes them smile, happy, and what they like to do. You may be surprised by what you discover when you take the time to ask questions. These insights into their personality can help you find a better way to work together and find the most creative, innovative and fun way to spend time together.

**Listen to them** - We need to listen and hear what they are telling us, so we can gain an understanding and work out how to care for them. Communication is a two-way street, be patient and give the person the time to express their emotions, needs, dreams and desires. When listening and talking to them look at them directly, show them you are listening through non-verbal reactions (e.g., nodding), and respond when it is appropriate. You also can encourage them to elaborate or ask them to clarify something they have said if needed.

**Encourage and promote their independence** –We need to let them make their own decisions and have control over their life where they can, such as what they wear, when and what they eat or drink, what activities they would like to do, or who they would like to spend time with. We can support them to decide by helping them weigh up their options by considering the benefits and risks. Some decisions might be more difficult for them due to their disability.

**Respect their privacy** – We need to respect their privacy by avoiding asking personal questions, if they want to share their personal difficulties they will. Be polite and patient when helping, and listen or ask for specific instructions, and be prepared if they refuse your offer of help and want to do it themselves. We need to treat them with respect and dignity, and not patronize or talk down to them.

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### How to care for carers

While the role of a carer can be rewarding, it can also be tough, and can impact on the carer's social, mental, physical and financial wellbeing. Carers often don't ask for help or accept help, so sometimes all we can do is check in with them on a regular basis, but it's important to be persistent, by offering help and keep including them in invitations, as being a carer can be very lonely while being very busy. Anything we can do to show we care about them can make a huge difference. Carers play a very important and valuable role in the person's life that they are looking after, they may keep deflecting, because they're not sick, so they feel almost guilty if they're taking any of the attention or prioritising themselves, over the person they are caring for.

**Listening to their needs without judgement** - They may simply need a chance to talk about their feelings and someone to listen. Caring can be physically demanding and emotionally draining, they may be worried and upset, or busy organising different things. We need to let them express themselves and feel heard, and validate how they are feeling, without judgment and being respectful of their feelings and decisions. It also can be helpful to offer to talk about something different if they need a break from the demands of caring.

**Care and support** - Often ,caregivers do not want to be a bother or may not feel they have the time to make a call, as it is one more thing for them to do. Be specific, ask the caregiver if you can go shopping, drive them to appointments, do the laundry, do some cleaning, run an errand, make a phone call, or cook a meal. By offering to do something specific, you are communicating that you are really willing to help the caregiver. Carers are busy and often need help or a break, but they may not know how to ask for help, they also might want to do something like go for a walk. You could offer to stay with the person they care for if they're comfortable with this, so they can have time to themselves.

**Giving them space and time** - There may be times when they need some space. They may turn down your offers to help or stop returning your calls or replying to messages. When this happens you can still send them a message that acknowledges that they are busy and this lets them know you are still there. Or perhaps. give them some space and check in with them the following week.

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**Reassure them** - Tell the caregiver it is okay to take a break from the caregiving role, even having some respite, as regular breaks for carers can ensure they are better able to continue to provide the care over the long term. You can let them know that it is okay to take time to renew themselves; they deserve it and need to care for themselves in order to continue providing care. Routine breaks are much like putting fuel in a car so it will continue to run.

### Other services to offer people with disability and carers

It might be helpful to recommend support groups to them, as it may be comforting for them to talk to others that 'get it' or have experienced what they are going through.

Offer them help hotlines or information about services that can be of assistance, in their state, these are some services in Australia for carers:

- [Lifeline](#) – 13 11 14 (24/7 help line offer supports to people to help them get through their difficult moments)
- [Wellways Australia](#) - 1300 111 400 (provides a range of services for carers).
- [Carer Gateway](#) - 1800 422 737 (an online and phone service that provides practical information and resources to support carers, and help connect them to local support services).
- [Mental Health Carers Australia](#) – – 1300 554 660 (Information and support line. They will listen, provide information and advice, and point you in the right direction for support).

The financial implications of taking care of someone with a disability can be a burden. But there is help in Australia, like the Disability Support Pension or the Carers Payment, from Centrelink. There also is the NDIS (The National Disability Insurance Scheme) which is a government scheme that funds people with disability to get the support and services they need to achieve their goals, this scheme does not affect any payments you may be receiving from the government. NDIS can provide you with funding for support and services as well as connect you to information and supports provided by other organizations and government agencies, to help you cover some costs associated with your disability. All the information needed is on the NDIS website, but you may need to ask someone that knows the process, as it can be difficult to navigate.

**NDIS** - <https://www.ndis.gov.au/> - Ph1800 800 110 (They also have a web chat you can use.)

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For more articles on mental please see Adelphicare website –

Physical and Mental Health Disabilities – NDIS, by Kylee Mingham - <https://adelphicare.org/documents/073-disability.pdf>

Crossing Boundaries – a personal story by Judith Cumpson

<https://www.adelphicare.org/documents/025-Crossing-boundaries.pdf>

