

# Building Bridges Across Difference and Disability

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## Tip Sheet for Health Care Providers

*Adapted from Building Bridges Across Difference and Disability,  
A Resource Guide for Health Care Providers, August 2002*

**Here are some suggestions that you can do to enhance comfort and competency in your interactions with people with facial and physical differences and/or disabilities.**

- Be willing to educate yourself about issues of living with facial and physical differences and/or disabilities and do not rely solely on clients to be your educators.
- Be open to learning from clients' experiences.
- Do not view your client as sick or incapacitated based solely on her/his physical difference and/or disability.
- Respect a client's choice in how she/he refers to her/his facial difference, physical difference, and/or disability. Ask your client what terms she/he uses.
- Become familiar with your client's knowledge level. Provide information in a clear and understandable manner by accommodating an individual's needs in comprehension as well as pace and format.
- Ask your client about her/his expectations, needs, and concerns prior to your assessment or intervention.
- Develop an awareness of other social determinants that impact an individual's health and health choices such as gender, culture, race, sexual orientation, age, or socio-economic status.
- Take time to find out about aspects of your client's life that will influence her/his health care needs and choices and self-care activities.
- Engage clients in health activities that address broad health needs such as sexual and reproductive health care, and preventative and health maintenance activities.
- Become comfortable taking a partnership approach, bringing relevant health knowledge and accessing a client's lived knowledge in order to mutually explore courses of action.

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- Discuss different options and assist your client in decision making.
  - Allow a companion or advocate to be present if your client wishes. However, ask your client if she/he would like to speak in private and ask for her/his own thoughts and feelings.
  - If performing procedures that are personal and intrusive, such as pelvic exams, ensure that your assistant is another health care provider rather than your client's support person.
  - Ask if and how a client needs assistance before giving it. Respect her/his decision to accept or refuse your offer of help and follow the client's instructions.
  - Ask for permission before looking at and/or touching a client's body and provide information about what you are doing and why.
  - Do everything reasonable and possible to make your facility physically and attitudinally accessible.
  - Be open to suggestions to modify your environment and/or procedures so that your clients are more comfortable.

**You can support your clients, validate their experiences,  
and facilitate their knowledge and abilities through  
your communication, your approach,  
and your sensitivity to boundaries.**

**For more information please contact**

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