

## **COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERSONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

1. **To Alert Cognitively or Emotionally Impaired** – It is likely that students with cognitive or emotional impairments will be able to use the same evacuation routes as the other students. The challenge is to keep them calm as you exit. If there is a buddy or companion assistant, quickly describe the situation and how to involve him or her in the evacuation. Let the student know what is happening. Keep him/her reassured.
2. **To Alert Deaf and Hearing Impaired** – The primary goal is to effectively communicate the nature of the situation and direct them to the appropriate route of evacuation. Students with hearing impairments will most likely be able to follow the same exit route as those who can hear. Communicate with a mobile electronic device or notepad and pen, with simple, concise speech or with sign language. Regardless of the method of communication used, convey two key messages: 1) there is an emergency and 2) how to respond.
3. **To Alert Blind or Visually Impaired** – Someone who is blind or visually impaired will generally be able to evacuate the same route as sighted students, but may need some assistance. Describe the nature the emergency and offer to guide him/her to the nearest emergency exit, evacuation assembly, shelter in place, or appropriate information regarding lockdown or run, hide, fight.
  - Touch the person on the shoulder gently.
  - Identify yourself and quickly explain the situation.
  - Ask if there are preferences regarding how to be guided.
  - Clearly describe where you are going and any obstacles or objects which may change your path or pattern.
  - Be aware of space as many may use the same route to evacuate.

### **Access to Communication for Students with Special Needs**

Communication access enables effective interaction with people who are deaf or blind or who have speech, vision or hearing limitations. Make written materials available in alternative formats (e.g., Braille, large print, disks, and audio format as needed) and provide hearing-assistive technologies such as amplified phones. Include auxiliary aids and services such as sign language interpreters. Alarm systems for fire, etc. will benefit most people if they incorporate both audible and visual elements. The hearing impaired students may be best alerted by flashing light alarms. An emergency is not the time to learn how to work a rarely used assistive device. The most effective communication systems are those used daily.

- Give clear, succinct verbal instructions.
- Communicate important information through gestures.
- Pictures, as appropriate, can provide easily understood instruction to many individuals.
- Guide students with low vision or blindness.
- Use electronic messaging boards, short message systems (SMS), teletypewriters (TTY) or telecommunications display devices (TDD), if you have them.
- Identify staff with foreign language skills, if needed.
- Have aides, buddies, volunteers and evacuation assistants practice basic American Sign Language for emergency words and instructions as needed such as:
 

» important	» fire exit
» emergency	» elevator closed
» keep calm	» stairs there
» must leave now	» okay
» fire	» lockdown
» danger	» gun/shooting