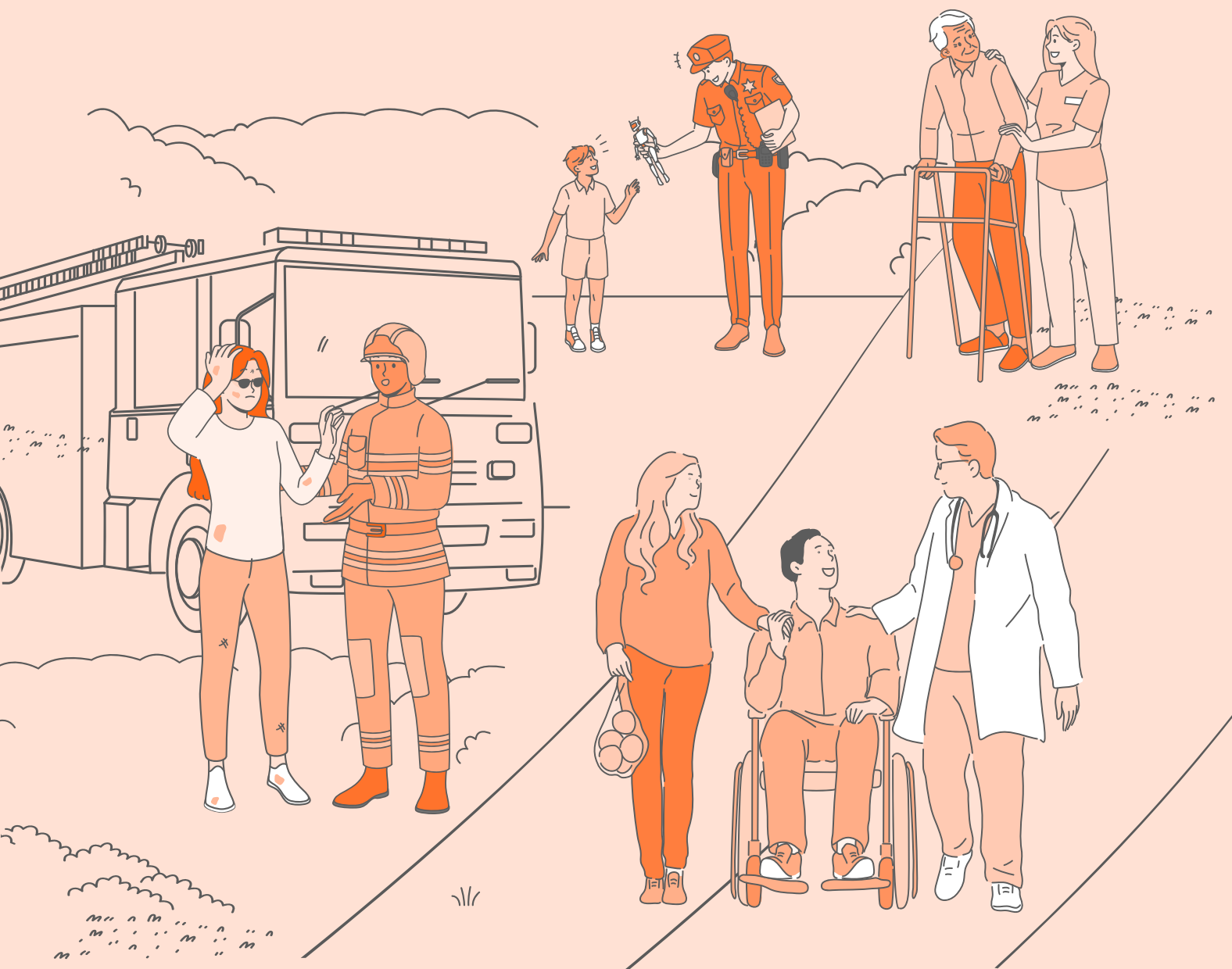


Toolkit

Advisory report:

Guidelines for first responders

How to act in emergencies



The toolkit forms part of the Advisory Report and should be read alongside the complete publication.

Toolkit for the Guidelines

How to use this Toolkit

This Toolkit gives you practical tools to support persons with disabilities in an emergency. It works together with the Guidelines above on “[How to act in emergencies: Guidelines for first responders](#)”.

Keep the Guidelines and Toolkit contents where you can reach them fast: in your vehicle, at your duty station, in your kit, or on your phone or tablet. Share them with your colleagues. Use them alongside your training and your team’s procedures.

What’s inside

1. **Communication basics:** Practical advice on how to communicate with and about persons with disabilities during an emergency.
2. **Keeping people calm:** Short guidance on how to reduce fear and stress during an emergency and support persons who may be frightened, confused, or in shock, along with wellbeing and mindfulness tools to manage stress and calm others on the scene.
3. **Continuing to learn:** Extra resources to go further, including training platforms on inclusive emergency response, and films and documentaries to build empathy and understanding of disability.

Communication basics

The words you use matter. In an emergency, how you communicate is as important as what you do. The words you use and the way you communicate shape how a person feels, how much they trust you, and whether they can follow your instructions. The wrong words can exclude, hurt, or discriminate, even when you do not mean to. The right words show respect, build trust, and protect the person's rights and dignity.

This section shows you how to communicate about persons with disabilities in a way that respects their rights, and how to speak with them during an emergency using practical techniques for different support requirements and needs. Use this section before an intervention, on the scene, and in training with your team.

How to communicate respectfully

The table below shows which words to avoid because they have negative, stigmatizing, or offensive connotations, and which words to use instead because they are rights-based, neutral, and person-centred. Use it to communicate with and about persons with disabilities in a way that respects their rights and their dignity.

Table 2. How to communicate respectfully about and with persons with disabilities

Avoid	Use instead
“The disabled” / “handicapped” / “those with disabilities”	Persons with disabilities
“Special child” / “child with special needs”	Child with a disability
“Suffers from schizophrenia”	Person with schizophrenia
“Normal / healthy / able-bodied people”	Persons without disabilities
“Mentally ill / crazy”	Person with a psychosocial disability / person with a mental health condition
“Retarded / slow”	Person with an intellectual or cognitive disability
“Blind / partially sighted”	Person who is blind / person with a visual impairment / person with low vision
“Deaf-mute”	Deaf or hard-of-hearing person
“Autistic”	Person with autism
“Invalid” / “has problems”	Has a disability / requires support with...

How to adapt your communication

Every person communicates differently. Your job is to find the way that works for the person in front of you. This section gives you the basics. It covers how to communicate with people with different support requirements during an emergency.

Table 3. How to adapt your communication across different support requirements

Support requirement	How to communicate
Visual and orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce yourself and your role before coming close, and let the person know when you leave. • Describe everything in words, using the person's body as the reference point. • Read written information out loud. Never hand it over. • For deafblind persons, check for a Braille display or other haptic device, or write letters on their palm. • Never use words like "over there" or "straight ahead."
Hearing and information access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move into the person's field of vision and wave to get their attention. • Keep your face visible and uncovered. Communicate at normal volume, slightly slower. • Carry paper and pen, or a writing board with markers. Use your phone, pictograms, or gestures. • Request a sign language interpreter. • Never shout, exaggerate your mouth movements, or turn your back.

Support requirement	How to communicate
Speech and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the person time. Never interrupt or complete their sentences. • Use questions the person can answer with yes or no, and confirm understanding. • Use their communication device, board, or pictograms, or let them write, type, point, or draw. • Never remove or switch off their communication device. • Support the person to communicate their needs and requirements, instead of assuming what the person needs.
Psychosocial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower and slow your voice. When in group, choose one person in your team to communicate. • Find out how the person feels before giving any instruction. • Use short, calm sentences and offer simple choices. • Never argue, correct, or contradict. • Never raise your voice, and never touch the person without seeking consent first.

Support requirement	How to communicate
Sensory and self-regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the area quieter before you communicate. Turn off sirens and avoid sudden movements. • Use short, literal sentences, and give one instruction at a time. • Check with a support person what triggers and what calms the person. • Keep the person's communication device with them at all times. • Never use figures of speech, and never stop the person from rocking, flapping, or repeating movements.
Cognitive and processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out whether the person has their own way of communicating, and use it. • Use short sentences and everyday words. Pause after each sentence. • Communicate with the person respectfully as you would with any adult, and avoid language that is too informal or childlike. • Offer two choices at a time, and repeat the same question in different ways to check understanding. • Never treat a single yes or a nod as proof of understanding, and never give two questions at once.

Support requirement	How to communicate
Mobility and physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek consent before you touch the person or their device, and find out what they can do on their own. • Communicate directly with the person, at eye level. • Explain what you will do before you do it. • Never stand over the person. • Never discuss the person with a colleague while they are there.
Medical and life-sustaining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for co-occurring conditions, overlapping support requirements and preferred methods of communication. • Seek consent before you touch the person or their device, and find out what they can do on their own. • Explain what you will do before you do it. • Communicate directly with the person, not with their support person. • If the person cannot communicate directly, check with their support person or look for the person's Personal Emergency Plan, Personal Emergency Card, or Communication Card, where available. These tools may contain information on communication preferences, medication, time-critical treatment, assistive devices, assistance animals, support contacts, and instructions for assistance.

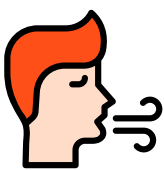
Keeping people calm

How to calm a person down

When a person feels lost, scared, or overwhelmed, grounding helps them come back to the present moment through their senses and their body. Slow breathing helps them calm down. These are some of the simplest tools you have as a first responder. They need no equipment and no special training. They need only your calm presence, your patience, and your willingness to stay with the person.

The exercises below work for different ages and abilities. Not every exercise works for every person, so always adapt. Older children and teenagers can follow the adult exercises with simpler language. Always involve a support person or trusted adult if one is present. Their calm presence is the most effective grounding tool for a child in distress. For deaf and hard-of-hearing persons, demonstrate rather than instruct verbally, use gesture, and never ask the person to close their eyes, as this removes their primary sensory channel and will increase rather than reduce distress.

Box 11

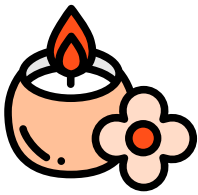


Exercise 1: The five breaths

A fast self-regulation technique that uses breath to align the nervous system and return to the present moment.

Ask the person to:

1. Take a deep breath in.
2. Breathe out slowly, making the exhale slightly longer than the inhale.
3. Repeat five times, extending the exhale a little more with each breath.
4. Keep eyes open or close them, if more comfortable.



Exercise 2: The candle and the flower

For the youngest children, counting and structured breathing can feel overwhelming. This visualization uses familiar, comforting images to guide the breath naturally and gently.

Ask the child to:

1. Hold both hands out in front of them.
2. Imagine a sweet-smelling flower in one hand and a small candle in the other.
3. Close their eyes if they feel comfortable doing so.
4. Breathe in slowly through the nose to smell the flower.
5. Breathe out slowly and gently toward the other hand to blow out the candle.
6. Repeat, and when finished, ask them to notice how they feel.

STEM-full. Mindful Breathing for Kids. [Link](#).

Tools to stay calm and present

Helping others starts with looking after yourself. When you are calm, you can help others stay calm too. These short resources are for you in two ways: for yourself, to manage stress, slow down your breathing and your heart rate, and recover after a hard intervention; and for your work, to learn new exercises and techniques you can use to ground a person, bring them back to the present moment, and help them feel safe. The resources also help you understand more about mental health, stress, and how to stay grounded in difficult moments.

Use them when you need a quick reset, as part of your daily routine, in training with your team, or share them with your colleagues.

Breathing and grounding

- Mindful Breathing Exercise — simple diaphragmatic breathing for immediate stress relief https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_iDaIAPrGo
- Box Breathing — structured breathing technique widely used for immediate stress relief <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a7uQXDkxEtM>
- 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique — sensory grounding exercise to anchor attention in the present moment <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zilmlTO5i9Q>
- Mindful breathing for kids — illustrated breathing technique designed for children <https://sf-stemful.com/mindful-breathing-for-kids/>
- Feeling overwhelmed? Try this quick meditation. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrZT-KxWc-U>
- 3 minutes to calm your mind: An SOS breathing practice for stress & burnout <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7u5-YBgmQ4>
- 10 minutes reset: Decompress your body and mind <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHkXvPq2pQE>
- Panicking? Try this super short meditation for coming to the present. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-bibn6Y7vCk>
- Mindfulness made easy: 8 meditation techniques you can learn in 10 minutes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xT9wAhLLj5E>

Mental health resources

- Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for depression by Zindel Segal, Mark Williams, and John Teasdale https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7J_VKqB3hc
- Full catastrophe living by Jon Kabat-Zinn <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJsqhOu2u0Q>
- Exploring life's biggest questions with Andy Puddicombe: Why meditate <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8XIiP4XVbIA>
- How to live without regret and guilt? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woio0Fayza4>
- What is loneliness? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nO-6JIoGILP8>
- How do we deal with change <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JRTEAwYaHC4>
- How do we cope with fear? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EUA5siagejA>
- How to be at peace with the unknown | Andy Crisis Wisdom <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XTNG5ujvk4>

- A four-step approach to working with anger – with Ron Siegel, PsyD https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouVM_5-8I9A
- How to cope with depression <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8Su5VtKeXU8>
- 12 signs you might be suffering from PTSD <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOibW5LXt3w>
- How the body keeps the score on trauma – Bessel van der Kolk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iTefkqYQz8g>

Platforms for deeper exploration

- **Mental Health Europe:** The main independent European non-governmental network organization committed to the protection of the rights of persons with psychosocial disabilities, the promotion of positive mental health, the prevention of mental distress, and the improvement of mental health care and social inclusion. <https://www.mentalhealtheurope.org> <https://www.mentalhealtheurope.org/library/mhevideopresentation>
- **TED Talks:** Short, accessible talks by leading thinkers and practitioners on disability, inclusion, empathy, belonging, mental health, and human behavior. Particularly useful for awareness-raising and pre-training preparation. <https://www.ted.com>
- **Headspace:** Structured mindfulness and meditation platform covering stress, anxiety, sleep, and focus. <https://www.youtube.com/@headspace>
- **The School of Life:** Psychology and emotional intelligence content for self-understanding and reflective practice. <https://www.youtube.com/@theschooloflifetv>

Continuing to learn

This is a list of European Union (EU) platforms where you can find training materials, good practice examples, and online courses.

They cover inclusive emergency response and disability inclusion. You can use them on your own to learn at your own pace. You can also use them with your team as part of training.

- **EU Civil Protection Knowledge Network:** Good practices, training materials, and case studies on inclusive emergency response across EU Member States and Participating States. <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu>
- **EU Academy:** Online courses on inclusion, fundamental rights, and related topics, available to anyone across EU Member States. <https://academy.europa.eu>
- **European Disability Forum (EDF) resource portal:** Policy updates, good practice examples, and resources on disability inclusion. <https://www.edf-feph.org>