

# TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING

with Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

**Children are more likely to be motivated to listen to adults about making healthy choices when they feel respected and appreciated. The following tips can help you work with children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to feel positive about themselves and develop healthy behaviors.**

## **When talking to a child with a disability:**

- Learn about how a child communicates before you talk to the child whenever possible.
- Speak directly to the child, not to the aide, parent, or caregiver.
- Do not make assumptions about a child's cognitive abilities just because he or she cannot communicate clearly.
- Do not assume that a child with a specific disability is just like other children with the same disability.
- Give a child with a disability more time to respond to your questions and to ask questions of their own.
- Avoid overcompensating or condescending by offering exaggerated praise or too much attention for every day accomplishments.
- Find out how a child understands their disability. Use the same words the child uses to describe their disability and avoid using your own terms.

## **When speaking about a child:**

- Use “person first” language. Say: a child with autism, not an autistic child. Or say: she is a student with Down syndrome, not she is a Downs student.
- Avoid negative labeling. Saying someone is “crippled by cerebral palsy” or “suffers from developmental delays” devalues the individual and can be hurtful and stigmatizing.
- Emphasize what a child *can* do, not what they can't.
- Understand that a child's disability does not define them—it's just one part of who they are.
- Seek additional help from someone who knows the child well when you want more information about a child's unique strengths and weaknesses.

MaineHealth

**LET'S GO!**

**5-2-1-0**