



## Blooming Together

May is a beautiful time of year. Flowers are blooming, the days are longer and the world around us feels full of possibilities. It's a perfect season to remind us that growth comes from care, patience, and connection; much like the relationships that Senior Companion volunteers build each day.

Through your gifts of time, kindness and dedication, you help create an environment where the people you support can thrive. Whether you are spending time together at a Day Program, sharing a conversation during a walk, helping with activities, or simply sitting and enjoying each other's company, your presence makes a meaningful difference. These moments of companionship may seem small, but they have a lasting impact.

For individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, consistent friendships and supportive relationships help build confidence, independence, and a sense of belonging. Your encouragement can help someone try a new activity, speak up in a group, or simply feel valued and heard. Just like sunshine and water help a garden grow, your patience and understanding help nurture the individuals you serve.

At the same time, these relationships often bring joy and fulfillment to our volunteers as well. Many Senior Companion volunteers have shared that the friendships they form are some of the most rewarding parts of their service. Laughter, shared stories, and everyday moments create bonds that brighten everyone's day.

This May, as we enjoy the beautiful weather and signs of spring around us, it's a perfect time to reflect on the ways you and your companion are blooming together. Your compassion and commitment help create stronger communities where everyone has the opportunity to feel included and appreciated.

Thank you for the kindness you bring each day. Because of you, friendships grow, confidence blossoms, and lives are enriched in ways that truly matter. ■

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## Join Us



If you know someone who would make a caring SCP volunteer, please have them contact:

**Melissa Slama**  
[melissas@nbrc.net](mailto:melissas@nbrc.net)

**707.566.3005**



North Bay  
Regional Center



AmeriCorps  
Seniors

# It's All About Communication

## Improving Conversation with Individuals Who Have Limited Speech

Communication is much more than words. For many individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, spoken language may be limited, but the desire to connect, share, and be understood is just as strong. As Senior Companion volunteers, learning a few simple strategies can make conversations more comfortable, meaningful, and enjoyable for everyone.

One of the most helpful tools is patience. Individuals with limited speech capacity will need more time to process questions and form a response. After asking a question, pause and give them time to think. It can feel tempting to jump in or rephrase too quickly, but waiting calmly shows respect and allows the person space to communicate in their own way.

Paying attention to nonverbal communication is also important. Facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, body movement, and tone of voice often communicate feelings and needs. A smile, a nod, or pointing gesture may carry just as much meaning as spoken words. By observing your companion and looking for cues, volunteers can better understand how someone is feeling or what they may be trying to express.

Using simple and clear language can also improve your communication. Short sentences and direct questions are easier to process than long explanations. For example, instead of asking, "What kinds of activities would you like to do this afternoon?" you might ask, "Do you want to draw or listen to music?" Offering choices can make it easier for someone to respond.

Another helpful technique is visual support. Pictures, objects, or gestures can reinforce meaning and help someone communicate their preferences. Pointing to items, showing an object, or using simple hand motions can help make the conversation clear and less frustrating.

Most importantly, remember that connection matters more than perfect conversation. Sharing a laugh, enjoying music together, doing a puzzle, or taking a walk can create meaningful interaction with few words spoken. Being present, attentive, and encouraging helps build trust and comfort.

Positive reinforcement can also go a long way. When someone makes an effort to communicate (whether through words, gestures, or expressions), acknowledge it with encouragement and warmth. This helps build confidence and makes future communication easier.

Every person communicates differently, and learning your assigned companion's unique style takes a little time. However, by practicing patience, observing carefully, and keeping communication simple and supportive, volunteers can help create conversations that feel more welcoming and respectful. In doing so, you strengthen relationships and ensure that every individual feels heard, valued, and included.



## Your Responsibilities As A Volunteer

- **Be Patient**
  - Wait patiently for a response to questions or to complete an action
- **Pay Attention to Your Companion**
  - Facial expression
  - Eye contact
  - Movements / gestures
  - Tone of voice / sounds
- **Use Simple and Clear Language**
  - Short sentences
  - Direct questions
  - Choice of 2 options
- **Visual Aids are Helpful**
  - Point to a picture
  - Point to an object
  - Use gestures
- **Connection Not Perfection**
  - Be fully present
  - Positive support
  - Eye contact
  - Eye level
- **Positive Reinforcement**
  - Reward the effort
  - Respond with warm facial expressions
  - Relaxed body language
- **Observe Your Companion—Learn Their Style**
  - Which words and facial expressions indicate they are happy?
  - What body movements or gestures indicate they approve or are ready?
  - How do they express they don't want to do something or don't want what was offered?

# Test Your Knowledge

## Choose the best answer for each question

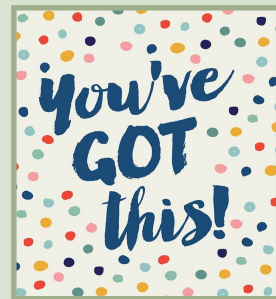
- 1. Communication includes more than just spoken words.**
  - A. True
  - B. False
- 2. When speaking with someone who has limited speech capacity, it is helpful to:**
  - A. Speak very quickly
  - B. Give them extra time to respond
  - C. Answer your own questions for them
  - D. Change subjects rapidly
- 3. Which of the following is an example of nonverbal communication?**
  - A. Facial expressions
  - B. Gestures or pointing
  - C. Body language
  - D. All of the above
- 4. Why is using simple and clear language important?**
  - A. It helps the person process information more easily
  - B. It makes the volunteer sound smarter
  - C. It shortens the visit
  - D. It avoids conversation
- 5. Which question is easier for someone with limited speech to answer?**
  - A. What kinds of activities would you like to do this afternoon?
  - B. Do you want to draw or listen to music?
  - C. Tell me about your favorite hobbies.
  - D. What do you think we should do today and why?
- 6. Visual supports can include:**
  - A. Pictures
  - B. Objects
  - C. Gestures
  - D. All of the above

## EARN TRAINING CREDIT

Answer the Questions, take a photo and send to Lisa Bordner, SCP Coordinator to receive payment for 1/2 hour training:

**[lbordner@nbrc.net](mailto:lbordner@nbrc.net) or Text: 707.569.2083**  
**Mail: 520 Mendocino Ave. Santa Rosa Ca 95401**

- 7. Connection and companionship are more important than having a perfect conversation.**
  - A. True
  - B. False
- 8. When someone attempts to communicate, volunteers should:**
  - A. Ignore the attempt if it's unclear
  - B. Correct them immediately
  - C. Encourage and acknowledge their effort
  - D. Change the topic
- 9. Which activity can still create meaningful interaction even if few words are spoken?**
  - A. Listening to music together
  - B. Doing a puzzle
  - C. Taking a walk
  - D. All of the above
- 10. Every person communicates in exactly the same way.**
  - A. True
  - B. False



# Run For The Roses—Kentucky Derby

The Kentucky Derby is an American horse racing event that has taken place annually since 1875. Patterned after races in England, Meriweather Lewis Clark Jr. decided to form an association and raise money to bring the sport of horse racing to America. The track was built on land leased from Clark's uncles, John and Henry Churchill.

The 152nd Kentucky Derby will take place on May 17, 2026 in Louisville, Kentucky, with spectators packing into Churchill Downs for one of three separate events in horse racing that comprise the Triple Crown. This year, the **Kentucky Derby** is May 17; the **Preakness Stakes** is the day before, on May 16, (held at Laurel Park while Pimlico Park is being repaired) in Baltimore, MD; and finally, the **Belmont Stakes** in Belmont Park, Elmont, New York on June 6).

Only 13 horses have ever won the Triple Crown.

Sir Barton (1919), Gallant Fox (1930), Omaha (1935), War Admiral (1937), Whirlaway (1941), Count Fleet (1943), Assault (1946), Citation (1948), Secretariat (1973), Seattle Slew (1977), Affirmed (1978), American Pharoah (2015), and Justify (2018).

As of 2026, American Pharoah and Justify are the only living Triple Crown Winners.



Main features of the Kentucky Derby include the extraordinarily ornate hats worn by women (and men occasionally), the drinking of Mint Julep cocktails, and a blanket of roses placed on the winning horse.





## Upcoming Paid Days Off / In-Service Dates

In-service dates are subject to change

NAME OF HOLIDAY	IS IT A HOLIDAY?	DAY YOU TAKE OFF
INT'L WORKERS DAY	YES	Fri-May 1
MEMORIAL DAY	YES	Mon-May 25
IN-SERVICE	NO	Thu-May 28
JUNETEENTH	YES	FRI—June 19
IN-SERVICE	Recognition Party	Thu—June 25
INDEPENDENCE DAY	YES	FRI—July 3
IN-SERVICE	NO	Thu-July 23

## MAY 2026

### A Few Celebration Days

- 5/2 [Kentucky Derby Day](#)
- 5/4 [Star Wars Day](#)
- 5/5 [Cinco de Mayo](#)
- 5/8 [No Socks Day](#)
- 5/14 [Dance Like a Chicken Day](#)
- 5/15 [Bike to Work Day](#)
- 5/18 [International Museum Day](#)
- 5/20 [National Rescue Dog Day](#)
- 5/21 [World Meditation Day](#)
- 5/25 [Memorial Day](#)
- 5/28 [National Hamburger Day](#)
- 5/31 [National Save Your Hearing Day](#)

### Awareness Topics

- [American Stroke Awareness Month](#)
- [Arthritis Awareness Month](#)
- [Brain Tumor Awareness Month](#)
- [Better Hearing and Speech Month](#)
- [Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Month](#)
- [Healthy Vision Month](#)
- [Hepatitis Awareness Month](#)
- [Lupus Awareness Month](#)
- [Melanoma/Skin Cancer Detection and Prevention Month](#)
- [Mental Health Awareness Month](#)
- [National Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month](#)
- [National Celiac Disease Awareness Month](#)
- [National Physical Fitness and Sports Month](#)

Is there something you'd like to learn more about? Let us know: [lbordner@nbrc.net](mailto:lbordner@nbrc.net)



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**MAY 2026**

**No May Birthdays**

**JUNE 2026**

Zena -----6/23

Rita B-----6/28

Shhh...the answers are below!

A

7	5	4	1	9	8	6	3	2
8	6	3	4	7	2	9	1	5
1	2	9	5	3	6	8	7	4
9	4	1	7	2	5	3	8	6
5	3	7	6	8	4	1	2	9
6	8	2	3	1	9	4	5	7
4	1	6	2	5	3	7	9	8
3	9	5	8	4	7	2	6	1
2	7	8	9	6	1	5	4	3

B

1	8	7	4	3	5	6	2	9
5	6	2	7	1	9	3	4	8
4	9	3	8	2	6	5	1	7
3	7	4	1	9	8	2	5	6
8	2	1	6	5	7	4	9	3
6	5	9	2	4	3	7	8	1
7	4	6	9	8	2	1	3	5
2	3	8	5	7	1	9	6	4
9	1	5	3	6	4	8	7	2