

Etiquette Guidelines

Appropriate interaction and communication with or about people with disabilities.

- **Speak directly to the person with a disability.**
- **Do not refer to a person's disability unless it is relevant.**
- **Most people with disabilities prefer "person-first" terminology such as "person who is blind" or "people with disabilities" since this acknowledges them as people first rather than their disability.**
- **Avoid referring to groups of people by their condition or disability such as "the blind," "the deaf," etc.**
- **Avoid sensational descriptive words when referring to a person's disability such as "suffers from," "is a victim of," "is afflicted with."**
- **Never say anything that you would not want said to or about yourself.**
- **Wait for instructions on the help needed and follow the instructions.**
- **Let people know, especially those who are blind or have low vision, where they are and where you are taking them.**
- **Do not pet service animals as they are working. Provide escort to an animal relief area if requested.**

Do Say

- ◆ person with a disability, or has a disability, people with disabilities
- ◆ non-disabled, able-bodied
- ◆ uses wheelchair, uses assistive device, e.g., wheelchair, crutches, walker,
- ◆ birth irregularity, congenital disability, birth injury
- ◆ person with a physical disability
- ◆ person who is deaf, hard of hearing
- ◆ has a speech disability, unable to speak
- ◆ person who is blind, has low vision
- ◆ person with an intellectual, cognitive, or developmental disability
- ◆ person with epilepsy, seizure disorder
- ◆ person with a psychiatric disability

Do NOT Say

- ◆ the disabled, handicapped, crippled, invalid, sick, deformed or gimp
 - ◆ normal or healthy
 - ◆ wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair people
 - ◆ birth defect, birth affliction, or deformed
 - ◆ crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, gimp
 - ◆ the deaf, hearing impaired, deaf mute
 - ◆ has a speech defect, is dumb
 - ◆ the blind, blind people, visually impaired
 - ◆ stupid, retard, slow, birth defect, mentally deficient, mentally challenged
 - ◆ epileptic, has fits
 - ◆ crazy, nuts, loony
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Common Courtesies

- ◆ If you normally shake hands with people you meet, **offer your hand** to someone with a disability as well.
- ◆ Be considerate of the extra time it might take a person with a disability to get things done or said. **Let the person set the pace** in walking and talking.
- ◆ When talking to someone who speaks slowly or with great effort, **don't pretend** to understand. Politely ask them to repeat what you did not understand or **ask if writing notes would be okay**.
- ◆ The **wheelchair is part of the individual's personal space**, don't lean on it. If conversing for more than a few minutes, place yourself at their eye level to spare both of you a stiff neck.
- ◆ When speaking with a person who is blind or has low vision, always remember to **identify yourself, introduce others** with you and indicate when you move from one place to another and when the conversation is at an end.
- ◆ When offering to guide a person who is blind or has low vision, allow that person to **take your arm**. This will enable them to easily follow your lead, even up or down curbs or stairs.
- ◆ **Use specific directions/distances**, such as left/3 steps away. You can also use clock position when directing a person; for example, the drinking fountain is at 1 o'clock.
- ◆ Always face a person who is deaf or hard of hearing so that they can read your lips. When in doubt if they understood, ask if it would be OK to write it. **Speaking loudly does not mean you will be heard**.
- ◆ As a rule of thumb, if you are ever unsure about what to say or do, **just ask**. More often than not, a person with a disability will be happy to let you know what they prefer.
- ◆ When **planning events** which involve people with disabilities, be aware of their needs (accessible restroom, level entries, Braille/tactile signage, etc.) in choosing the location and modes of transportation.
- ◆ When talking to a person with a disability, **speak directly** to him or her rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter. Don't assume that a person accompanying someone in a wheelchair is an attendant; they may be a friend or a partner.



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