

DISABILITY AWARENESS



DISABILITIES ARE A NATURAL PART OF THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE

People with disabilities should always be treated as one would treat any person; they are people, they are not their disability. The disability community is the world's most inclusive minority community. People of every color, gender, religion, ethnicity or age are or may become a member of the disability community.



DISABILITY AWARENESS INCLUDES UNDERSTANDING

Each person functions differently with his/her disability. Some disabilities, such as respiratory, epileptic, heart, orthopedic and sensory conditions are "hidden," whereas a person in a wheelchair is clearly visible. The one thing that is the same among nearly all persons with a disability is that they can work and should have the opportunity to hold a job. Unemployment among people with disabilities is over 60 percent. Whether born from ignorance, fear or misunderstanding, negative perceptions keep some employers from appreciating and experiencing the full potential of a person with a disability. This booklet will provide you with facts and the answers to some questions you may have regarding people with disabilities. Awareness and education are the first steps in providing people with disabilities greater access to social and economic independence.



ETIQUETTE FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

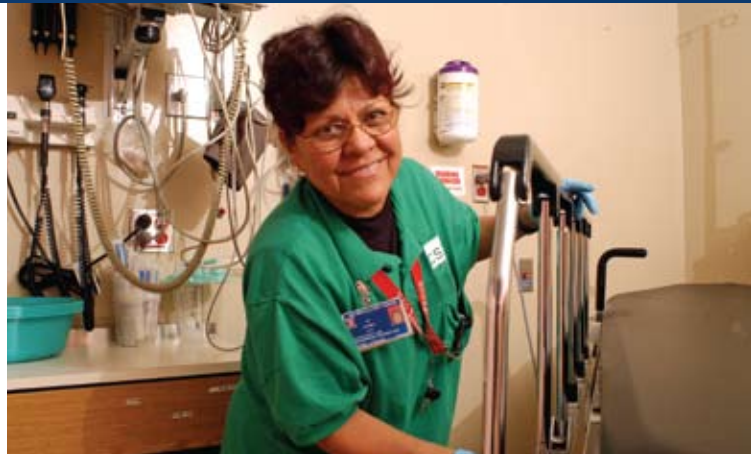
- 1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person** rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter.
- 2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands.** People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands.
- 3. When meeting a person who is visually impaired, verbally identify yourself** and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
- 4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted, then listen or ask for instructions.** It is very important not to make assumptions about what an individual can or cannot do without assistance.
- 5. Treat adults as adults.** Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. Also, never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the shoulder or head.
- 6. Leaning or hanging on a person's wheelchair is similar to hanging on a person;** one should view a wheelchair as part of the personal body space of the person who is using it. Therefore, as a general rule, ask yourself if you have a close enough relationship with a particular person such that you would reach out and touch that individual regardless if he or she uses a wheelchair. If the answer is yes, then it might be more appropriate to lean or hang on the person's wheelchair.
- 7. Listen attentively when you are talking with a person who has difficulty speaking.** Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. Never try to finish a person's sentence just because they are talking slowly or more labored than you. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. If you are still unable to understand what the person is saying, ask if there is someone who can interpret for you or consider using alternative means of communication.
- 8. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or crutches, place yourself at eye level** in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
- 9. When trying to get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the individual on the shoulder or wave your hand.** Look directly at the person and speak clearly in a normal, non-exaggerated way. Some people may read lips, however lip-reading is only 30–50 percent effective. For those who do lip-read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source and by keeping your hands away from your mouth when speaking. Not all people who are deaf or hard of hearing are able to lip-read, in which case an interpreter may be present or you may need to consider alternative forms of communication such as demonstrative or written.
- 10. Relax.** Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted common expressions that seem to relate to a person's disability, such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about that?"

Above all, do not be afraid to ask questions when you are unsure of what to do!

The etiquette was adapted from many sources, including the United Cerebral Palsy Association's version of the Ten Commandments, which was updated by Irene M. Ward & Associates (Columbus, Ohio) to provide the most current language for its video, *The Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities*.

POSITIVE IMAGE EMPOWERS: ALWAYS USE PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first. Group designations such as “the deaf” or “the disabled” are inappropriate because they do not reflect the individuality, equality or dignity of people with disabilities. The following are examples of negative and positive phrases. Note that the positive phrases put the person first. Use this list as general guidance, but individual preference will vary. If in doubt, ask people what terminology they prefer.



NEGATIVE PHRASES:

Retarded, mentally defective

The blind

The disabled, handicapped

A hearing loss, the deaf

Afflicted by multiple sclerosis

Cerebral palsy victim

Epileptic

Confined or restricted to a wheelchair

Stricken by muscular dystrophy

Crippled, lame, deformed

Dumb, mute

Fit

Crazy, nuts

The de-institutionalized

Admits he/she has a disability

Has overcome his/her disability; courageous (when it implies the person has courage because of having a disability)

Normal person

Suffers from a disability, victim

POSITIVE PHRASES:

Person with intellectual/cognitive disabilities

Person who is blind, person who is visually impaired

Person with a disability

Person who is deaf, person who is hard of hearing

Person who has multiple sclerosis

Person with cerebral palsy

Person with epilepsy

Person who uses a wheelchair

Person who has muscular dystrophy

Person with a physical disability

Unable to speak, uses synthetic speech

Seizure

Person with a psychiatric disability/mental illness

Person who no longer lives in an institution

Says he/she has a disability

Successful, productive

Person without a disability

Person has a disability

MYTHS & FACTS OF DISABILITIES

Myth: People with disabilities cannot be productive in the workplace.

Fact: People with disabilities have a variety of skill sets and abilities that make them very productive in the workplace. Ability, not disability, counts.

Myth: People with disabilities don't want to work.

Fact: Most people with disabilities want to work. In fact, two out of three people with disabilities who were unemployed (67%) said they would prefer to be working.*

Myth: People with disabilities always need help.

Fact: Many people with disabilities are very independent and prefer to be responsible for themselves. If you offer assistance, wait until your offer has been accepted, then listen or ask for instructions.



Always Remember:

- Educate yourself and others.
- Speak out when you hear others talk negatively about people with disabilities.
- Hire qualified people with disabilities.
- Encourage participation of people with disabilities in social, community and workplace events by making sure that the meeting or event sites are accessible.

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

- Do not assume a person cannot perform a certain task. With the right accommodations and support, a person with a severe disability can be very productive. Also, a person with a disability knows best what he or she needs in terms of accommodations.
- Keep hallways and office spaces clear from excess clutter that may make it difficult for people to maneuver around or reach equipment such as fax machines, copiers and printers.
- Disseminate company information, announcements or events through various methods of communication such as email, voicemail, and flyers.
- Provide accessible restrooms, drinking fountains and telephones. If such facilities are not available, be ready to offer alternatives, such as a private or employee restroom, a glass of water or a desk phone.
- When planning a meeting or other event, try to anticipate specific accommodations that a person with a disability might need. If a barrier cannot be avoided let the person know ahead of time.
- Transportation is often a major issue for those who have to depend on others to get them to and from work. Offering flexible work schedules or a telework option are ways to accommodate transportation needs.
- Be prepared. Encourage fellow employees to learn how to assist persons with disabilities in cases of emergency, including proper evacuation procedures and medical emergencies.
- Help encourage interaction between employees with disabilities and their co-workers. Include employees with disabilities in group activities, meetings and social gatherings. Forming work groups or teams with interdependent tasks is an excellent way to enhance employee relations.

COMMON COURTESIES

- Remember that people with disabilities have abilities.
- Ask people with disabilities what terminology they prefer; not all people with disabilities use the same words to describe themselves and their disabilities.
- Familiarize yourself with appropriate ways of communicating with people with disabilities.
- Ask first before assisting a person with a disability. Wait for acceptance and instructions before you help.
- Be considerate of the extra time it may take a person with a disability to walk, talk, write or perform a task.
- Use common sense, and apologize if you offend someone with a disability in the same manner you would apologize if you offend someone without a disability.
- Identify yourself verbally to a person who is blind or visually impaired, i.e. "Hi, Mary, this is John Doe."
- Extend your hand to shake if that is what you normally do. A person who cannot shake hands will let you know.
- A person should not be defined by their condition. Do not refer to individuals by their disability.
- Do not block ramps or park in disability-designated parking spaces.
- When describing a person with a disability, do not emphasize disability over other characteristics.
- Do not use "normal" to describe someone who is not disabled, implying that someone with a disability is not normal. Say that the person is "non-disabled."
- Do not interact with a service dog while it is working.
- If you encounter a person having a seizure, do not try to put anything in his/her mouth. Do not give him/her something to drink and do not attempt to restrain his/her movements.
- When speaking to a person with a disability, be friendly but not overly friendly, paternalistic or condescending. Do not assume you need to speak loudly.

RESOURCES



Disability Information

<http://www.disabilityinfo.gov>

This user-friendly website contains links to information of interest to people with disabilities, their families, employers, service providers and other community members.

<http://www.disaboom.com>

This community-building site connect millions of people with disabilities.

Job Accommodation Network

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu>

A free consulting service designed to increase the employability of people with disabilities by:

1. Providing individualized worksite accommodation solutions;
2. Providing technical assistance regarding the American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other disability-related legislation; and
3. Educating callers about self-employment options.

The Office Of Disability Employment Policy

<http://www.dol.gov/odep>

This site provides information regarding disability-related employment policies and practices affecting the employment of people with disabilities.

The **AbilityOne Program** is the largest source of employment for people who are blind or have other severe disabilities in the United States. More than 600 nonprofit organizations employ these individuals and provide quality goods and services to the federal government at a fair market price. The Program is administered by the Committee for Purchase From People Who Are Blind or Severely Disabled, an independent federal agency, with assistance from National Industries for the Blind (NIB), and NISH—Creating Employment Opportunities for People with Severe Disabilities. For more information go to www.abilityone.org or call 1-800-999-5963.

