

Disability Etiquette

Fear of the unknown and lack of knowledge about how to act can lead to uneasiness when meeting a person who has a disability.

Remember: a person with a disability is a **person with feelings**. Treat him or her as *you* would want to be treated.

You can't always see someone's disability. If a person acts unusual or seems different, **just be yourself**. Let common sense and friendship break down any barriers you may encounter.

Following these guidelines may help prevent uncomfortable situations.

Basic Points of Etiquette...

1. Avoid asking personal questions about someone's disability. If you must ask, be sensitive and show respect. Do not probe, if the person declines to discuss it.
2. Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to do or say something.
3. Be polite and patient when offering assistance, and **wait** until your offer is accepted. Listen or ask for specific instructions.
4. When planning a meeting or other event, try to anticipate specific accommodations a person with a disability might need. If a barrier cannot be avoided, let the person know ahead of time.
5. Be respectful of the rights of people with disabilities to use accessible parking spaces.

When speaking or writing about disability...

1. Refer to a person's disability only when necessary and appropriate.
2. Use *people first* language-- refer to the individual first, then to his or her disability. (*It is better to say "the person with a disability," rather than "the disabled person."*)
3. The following terms should be **avoided** in a disability context, because they disempower people or have negative meanings:

invalid	able-bodied	crippled
wheelchair-bound	victim	
defect	suffers from	
handicapped	a patient	

4. Avoid terms that imply that people with disabilities are overly courageous, brave, special, or superhuman.

A Guide to Using Appropriate Language When Talking About Disability

1. **Do not refer to a person's disability unless it is relevant.**
2. **Use "disability" rather than "handicap" to refer to a person's disability.** It is okay to say that a person is handicapped by obstacles, such as architectural barriers or the attitudes or ignorant or insensitive people. Never use "cripple/crippled" in any reference of disability
3. **When referring to a person's disability, try to use "people first" language.** In other words, when necessary, it is better to say "person with a disability" rather than "a disabled person" in the first reference. Since "disabled" is an adjective, it is important to avoid ridiculous - and improper - constructions such as "disabled group" or "disabled transportation." Instead, build phrases using the word "disability." For example, "disability activist," or "disability community," are correct and not contradictions to the "people first" ideas.
4. **Avoid referring to people with disabilities as "the disabled, the blind, the epileptics, the retarded, a quadriplegic,"** etc. Descriptive terms should be used as adjectives, not as nouns.
5. **Avoid negative or sensational descriptions of a person's disability.** Don't say "suffers from," "a victim of," or "afflicted with." Don't refer to people with disabilities as "patients" unless they are receiving treatment in a medical facility. Never say "invalid." These portrayals elicit unwanted sympathy, or worse, pity toward individuals with disabilities. Respect and acceptance is what people with disabilities would rather have.
6. **Don't portray people with disabilities as overly courageous, brave, special, or superhuman.** This implies that it is unusual for people with disabilities to have talents or skills.
7. **Don't use "normal" to describe people who don't have disabilities.** It is better to say "people without disabilities" or "typical," if necessary to make comparisons.
8. **Never say "wheelchair-bound" or "confined to a wheelchair."** People who use mobility or adaptive equipment are, if anything, afforded freedom and access that otherwise would be denied them.

9. **Never assume that a person with a communication disorder (speech impediment, hearing loss, motor impairment) also has a cognitive disability, such as mental retardation.** On the other hand, people with mental retardation often speak well.

Rules for Appropriate Language

USE	AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · person with a disability / has a disability people with disabilities / have disabilities disabled person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the disabled / the handicapped, invalids, patients, crippled, deformed, defective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> people without disabilities typical person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · normal, healthy, able-bodied
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> wheelchair user / uses a wheelchair 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · wheelchair-bound / confined to a wheelchair
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> congenital disability / birth anomaly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · birth defect / affliction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has cerebral palsy (CP) or other condition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · a <i>victim</i> of cerebral palsy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has had polio / experienced polio has a disability as a result of polio 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · suffers from polio / afflicted with polio post-polios (as a noun referring to people)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> people who have mental retardation (MR) person with mental retardation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the mentally retarded / mentally deficient a retardate / a retard (never) a feeble-minded person
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> child with a developmental delay (DD) person with a developmental disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Slow
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> person with Downs Syndrome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the Downs person / Mongoloid (never)

<p>person who has epilepsy people with seizure disorders seizure / epileptic episode or event</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the epileptic (to describe a person) the epileptics fits / epileptic fits
<p>people who have mental illness person with a mental or emotional disorder</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · the mentally ill crazy, psycho, mental case (never)
<p>people who are blind / visually impaired person who is hard of hearing person who is deaf / the Deaf (Deafness is a cultural phenomenon and should be capitalized in those instances.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · <i>the</i> blind - hearing impaired (translates as "broken hearing" in sign language) deaf-mute deaf and dumb
<p>speech or communication disability</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · tongue-tied, mute

When meeting and talking with a person who has a disability...

1. A handshake is NOT a standard greeting for everyone. When in doubt, ASK the person whether he or she would like to shake hands with you. A smile along with a spoken greeting is always appropriate.
2. Speak directly to the person with a disability, not just to the ones accompanying him or her.
3. Don't mention the person's disability, unless he or she talks about it or it is relevant to the conversation.
4. Treat adults as adults. Don't patronize or *talk down to* people with disabilities.
5. Be patient and give your undivided attention. especially with someone who speaks slowly or with great effort.
6. Never pretend to understand what a person is saying. Ask the person to repeat or rephrase, or offer him or her a pen and paper.
7. It is okay to use common expressions like "see you soon" or "I'd better be running along."
8. Relax. Anyone can make mistakes. Offer an apology if you forget some courtesy. Keep a sense of humor and a willingness to communicate.

When meeting someone with a disability that affects learning, intelligence, or brain function...

1. Keep your communication simple. Rephrase comments or questions for better clarity.
2. Stay focused on the person as he or she responds to you.
3. Allow the person time to tell or show you what he or she wants.

When you are with a person who uses a wheelchair...

1. Do not push, lean on, or hold onto a person's wheelchair unless the person asks you to. The wheelchair is part of his or her personal space.
2. Try to put yourself at eye level when talking with someone in a wheelchair. Sit or kneel in front of the person.
3. Rearrange furniture or objects to accommodate a wheelchair before the person arrives.
4. Offer to tell where accessible rest rooms, telephones, and water fountains are located.
5. When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles (curbs, stairs, steep hills, etc.).
6. Don't pet or distract a service dog. The dog is responsible for its owner's safety and is always working. It is not a pet.

Talking with a person who is deaf or uses a hearing aid...

1. Let the person take the lead in establishing the communication mode, such as lip-reading, sign language, or writing notes.
2. Talk directly to the person, even when a sign language interpreter is present.
3. If the person lip-reads, face him or her directly, speak clearly and with a moderate pace.
4. Do not position yourself in front of a window or harsh light or the person who is deaf or hard of hearing will have difficulty seeing you.
5. With some people, it may help to simplify your sentences and use more facial expressions and body language.

When meeting a person with a disability that affects speech...

1. Pay attention, be patient, and wait for the person to complete a word or thought. Do not finish it for the person.
2. Ask the person to repeat what is said, if you do not understand. Tell the person what you heard and see if it is close to what he or she is saying.
3. Be prepared for various devices or techniques used to enhance or augment speech. Don't be afraid to communicate with someone who uses an alphabet board or a computer with synthesized speech.

Interacting with a person who is blind or has a disability that affects sight or vision...

1. When greeting the person, identify yourself and introduce others who may be present.
2. Don't leave the person without excusing yourself first.
3. When asked to guide someone with a sight disability, never push or pull the person. Allow him or her to take your arm, then walk slightly ahead. Point out doors, stairs, or curbs, as you approach them.
4. As you enter a room with the person, describe the layout and location of furniture, etc.
5. Be specific when describing the location of objects. (*Example: "There is a chair three feet from you at eleven o'clock."*)
6. Don't pet or distract a guide dog. The dog is responsible for its owner's safety and is always working. It is not a pet.