

# Disability Etiquette

Adapted from University of Northern Iowa, <http://www.uni.edu/equity/DisabilityEtiquette.shtml>

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Individuals with disabilities are people!
- Individuals with disabilities are whole people!
- They expect to be treated with the same dignity and respect that you do.
- Just because someone has a disability does not mean he/she is disabled.

## DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

- Remember, he/she is a person, NOT a disability.
- Never patronize them by patting them on the head or back.
- Offer to shake their hand, even if it appears as if they have limited use of their arms or have an artificial limb. Simply the gesture will help them feel accepted and create a warmer environment for communication.
- For those who cannot shake hands, lightly touch the individual on the shoulder or arm to welcome their presence.
- Look at and speak directly to the person, not through a companion, care-taker, or interpreter.
- Treat adults as adults.
- Don't apologize if you use an expression such as "I gotta run" or "See you later" that relates to the person's disability. These expressions are part of everyday language and it is likely the apology will be more offensive than the expression.
- Don't pet or feed service animals or guide dogs as they are working.
- When giving directions, make sure you consider weather, locations of ramps/curb-cuts, and other physical obstacles that may hinder travel for individuals with disabilities.

## SPEECH DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

- Never assume, many people mistakenly identify these individuals as being mentally retarded or mentally ill. Make sure to be patient in finding out which communication method works best for them.
- Be 100 percent attentive when conversing with an individual who has difficulty speaking. e If you are in a noisy and/or crowded environment, don't panic. Just try and move to a quieter location to talk.
- Let them complete their own sentences. Be patient and do not try to speak for them. Do not
- pretend to understand; instead, tell them what you do understand and allow them to respond. e Do not be corrective, but rather, encouraging.
- When necessary, it's OK to ask short questions that require short answers.

## **WHEELCHAIR ETIQUETTE**

- Individual who use wheelchairs may require different degrees of assistance.
- Some who use wheelchairs may also use canes or other assistive devices and may not need his/her wheelchair all the time.
- Do not automatically assist the individual without permission. It is ok to offer assistance. However, if the offer is not accepted, respect his/her request!
- If you will be speaking with an individual in a wheelchair for more than a couple minutes, find a place where you can sit down to give the individual a more comfortable viewing angle.
- A person's wheelchair is part of his/her own personal space. Never move, lean on, rock, or touch his/her wheelchair without permission. In addition to being rude, it can be dangerous.
- Do not assume that having to use a wheelchair is a tragedy. Wheelchairs can be a means of freedom to fully engage in life.

## **HEARING DISABILITY ETIQUETTE**

- Do not shout at a hearing-impaired person unless they request you to. Just speak in a normal tone but make sure your lips are visible.
- Keep conversations clear and find a quiet location to communicate.
- If you are asked to repeat yourself, answering "nothing, it's not important" implies the person is not worth repeating yourself for. It is demeaning; be patient and comply.
- Show consideration by facing the light source and keeping things (such as cigarettes or your hands) away from you mouth while speaking.

## **VISUAL Disability Etiquette**

- When meeting someone with a visual disability, identify yourself and others with you (e.g. "Jane is on my left and Jack is on my right."). Continue to identify the person with whom you are speaking.
- If you go out to dinner with an acquaintance with a visual disability, ask if you can describe what is on the menu and what is on his/her plate.
- When walking with someone with a visual impairment, offer them your arm for guidance. They will likely keep a half-step behind to anticipate curbs and steps.

## LANGUAGE GUIDELINES: DISABILITY VS. HANDICAP

- A **DISABILITY** is a condition caused by such things as an accident or trauma, disease, or genetics that limits a person's vision, hearing, speech, mobility, or mental function.
- A **HANDICAP** is a constraint imposed upon a person, regardless of that person's ability or disability. These constraints can be physical or attitudinal. For example, stairs and curbs are handicaps imposed on those who use wheelchairs.

Always remember that the **PERSON** is not the **CONDITION**. Keep all your speech person focused, not disability focused.

<b>ACCEPTABLE</b>	<b>UNACCEPTABLE</b>
A person with a disability	Cripple
Disability	Handicap; handicapped person
A person who has mental or developmental disabilities	Moron; retarded; feeble-minded
Able-bodied; able to walk, see, etc.	Healthy; normal—just because someone has a disability does not mean they are not healthy
A wheelchair user Walks with aid	Confined or restricted to a wheelchair
Mental or emotional disability	Crazy; insane
A person who is deaf/hearing impairment	Deaf and dumb; mute
A person with epilepsy	An epileptic
He has cerebral palsy	He is a cerebral palsy victim
A successful person A production person	Person who has overcome his/her/their disability. Person who is courageous

### **AVOID TERMS WHICH CARRY A NEGATIVE CONNOTATION:**

Abnormal, Afflicted, Confined, Crippled, Defective, Handicap, Invalid, Lame, Palsied, Retarded, Stricken, Sufferer, Victim, Withered. Use empowering, individualized vocabulary; don't clump them with phrases like "title blind" or "the disabled."