

Disability Etiquette

Words are very powerful tools. Today's society is acutely aware of and tries to be sensitive to using terminology that is not offensive to another individual or group. One group that the public and others have heard little about is people with disabilities. We have developed this flyer to give the reader information about what terminology people with disabilities prefer. We encourage you to review this information often, especially if you are going to be meeting or writing about people with disabilities. To know more, please contact one of the agencies listed.

IMPROPER TERMINOLOGY

Language we use to describe someone usually creates an attitude. Just as some well-known, four-letter words are offensive, so are some words used in referring to people with disabilities. These terms should be avoided when speaking to or about people with disabilities:

Afflicted
Cerebral Palsied
Confined to a Wheelchair
Courageous
Unfortunate
Burden
Deaf and Dumb or Deaf Mute
Handicapped or Handicapper
Incapacitated
Deformed
Crippled
Wheelchair Bound
Poor, Pitiful
Retard or Retardate
Spastic
Suffering
Victim
Hearing Impaired

PROPER TERMINOLOGY

A person who is:

Blind, Visually Impaired
Deaf, Hard of Hearing
Non-Disabled
Physically Disabled

A person who has:

Cerebral Palsy
Multiple Sclerosis
Muscular Dystrophy
Polio

Appropriate Phrases:

A woman who uses a wheelchair
A person with a spinal cord injury
An employee with arthritis
A child who uses a communication device
A person with a mental illness

Hint:

Always remember the person comes before the disability. For example, "a person with MS" ...or... "Jane, who has CP" ...etc.

Speech Difficulty

There are many reasons for having difficulty with speech. Cerebral palsy, deafness, head injury and stroke are just a few of the causes. When dealing with a person with speech difficulty:

- Speak directly to the individual, not to a friend or companion.
- Keep eye contact, do not look around or turn away.
- Try to give your whole, unhurried attention if the person has difficulty speaking.
- Do not complete the speaker's sentences. Let the person finish.
- Don't become flustered when you cannot understand, or pretend to understand when you really don't.
- Do not be afraid to ask the person to repeat or spell a word. If you still have difficulty, ask them to use different words.
- Do not equate speech difficulties with intellectual ability.

Mobility Limitations

Limitations can vary greatly and may include such disabilities as arthritis, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, paraplegia and quadriplegia. When you are with a person using a wheelchair:

- Treat a person's wheelchair or adaptive aid with respect. This device is an extension of that person's space.
- Talk directly to the person using the wheelchair, rather than to someone else. Get on the individual's level if possible, kneeling on one knee, sitting in a chair, etc. If this is not possible, stand back so he/she does not have to look sharply upwards.
- In greeting a person, feel free to extend your hand to shake hands. Use a gentle grip and do not squeeze.
- Push a wheelchair only when asking the person if assistance is needed. Listen to instructions the person may give.
- Learn the location of "accessible" ramps, restrooms, elevators and telephones.
- Persons with physical disabilities are now using service animals (dogs) more frequently. Service animals are highly trained. Do not pet or distract a service dog.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

This term includes all people who have a hearing loss to any degree.

When communicating with a person who is deaf or hard of hearing:

- Make sure you have the person's attention before you begin speaking. Either a tap on the shoulder or a visual signal can be used to gain attention.
- Always face the person with a hearing loss when speaking, making sure there is good light on your face.
- Speak normally, and do not exaggerate your speech — the person may wish to speech read. Speech reading is only 30-50% effective.
- Do not speak with anything in your mouth, such as gum, a pipe or a cigarette. Also, take care to keep your hands away from your mouth so that your lip movements, facial expression and visual clues can be seen. People with hearing loss find it hard to hear in the presence of background noise. Be sure to move away from such noise or turn down the radio or TV when conversing.
- If a word is not understood, try another word or rephrase rather than simply repeating yourself.
- Beware of the false interpretations (a nod of the head does not necessarily mean, "I understand").
- Do not shout. Hearing aids make sounds louder, not clearer.
- If a sign-language interpreter is present, talk directly to the person who is deaf — not to the interpreter.
- Use a qualified sign-language interpreter when necessary.
- Use sign language only if you are qualified. Otherwise, incorrect information may be conveyed.
- If all else fails, use a pad and pencil to communicate.

People with Cognitive Disabilities learn best when:

- Information and instructions are presented in small, sequential steps, and reviewed frequently.
- Prompt and consistent feedback are provided.
- A hands-on approach is used.
- They are provided concrete rather than abstract information.
- The purpose of a task is made clear.
- They are provided safe opportunities to make mistakes.
- Skills are taught in natural environments.

Blind or Loss of Vision

This disability can range from total blindness to partial loss of sight.

When you are with a person who is blind or has a loss of vision:

- Speak directly to the person, using a normal tone of voice.
- Identify yourself.
- Do not be afraid to use terms such as "See you soon."
- Do not pet a guide dog. The dog has an important job to do and petting may be distracting.
- Offer assistance but be guided by the individual's direction.
- Walk alongside and slightly ahead of the person you are assisting. Never hold the person's arm while walking. Let the individual hold your arm. The motion of your body tells the person what to expect.
- Avoid escalators or revolving doors, if possible.
- Assist the individual on stairs by guiding a hand to a banister. When giving assistance in seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat.
- Never leave a person who is blind in an open area. Instead, lead the person to the side of the room, a chair or some landmark from which he or she can obtain a direction for travel.
- Do not leave a person who is blind abruptly after talking in a crowd — or where there is noise that may obstruct the person's hearing—without saying that you are leaving. Otherwise, he or she may be talking when no one is listening or even present.

For more information about communicating with people with disabilities or the Americans with Disabilities Act, contact:



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