

Etiquette Quick Tips

Interacting with People with Disabilities

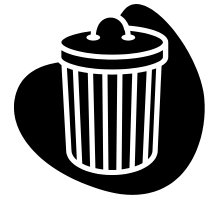
General Tips

- Focus on the person, not on the disability.
- Offer people with a disability the same dignity, consideration, respect, and rights you expect for yourself.
- If you don't know what to do, allow the person to help put you at ease.
- Do not be afraid to make a mistake. Relax.
- Do not patronize people by patting them on the head or shoulder.
- Treat adults as adults. Address people with disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others present.
- Do not assume that a person with a disability needs assistance. Ask before acting. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then wait for or ask for instructions. Respect the person's right to indicate the kind of help needed. Do not be offended if your help is not accepted. Many people do not need help. Insisting on helping a person is the same as taking control away from them.
- If the person with a disability is accompanied by a friend or family member, look at and speak directly to the person with the disability rather than to or through the other person.
- Do not assume that a person with a disability is more fragile than others. These feelings may make you reluctant to ask certain questions that should be asked.
- If service counters are too high for some users, such as people of short stature and people using wheelchairs, step around counters to provide service. Keep a



clipboard or other portable writing surface handy for people unable to reach the counter when signing documents.

- Know the location of accessible routes including parking spaces, rest rooms, drinking fountains, dressing rooms, and telephones.
- Understanding disability access issues and responding accurately, quickly and respectfully to requests for information, directions or assistance conveys genuine welcome.
- Watch for and remove these common barriers:
 - Vehicles blocking ramps
 - Housekeeping and cleaning carts blocking hallways and rest rooms
 - Potted plants, benches, ashtrays, trash cans and other items blocking access to ramps, railings and elevator call buttons
 - Parking personnel using an accessible parking space as waiting areas
 - Snow and ice on walkways, ramps and parking areas



Language Issues

- Choose disability terms that describe diversity in accurate and respectful ways.
- Disability-specific language should be precise, objective, and neutral in order to avoid reinforcing negative values, biases and stereotypes.
- Avoid referring to people by their disability i.e., "an epileptic." A person is not a condition. Rather, they are "people with epilepsy" or people with disabilities.
- People are not "bound" or "confined" to wheelchairs. Wheelchairs are used to increase mobility and enhance freedom. It is more accurate to say, "wheelchair user" or "person who uses a wheelchair."
- It is not necessary to avoid these expressions
- When around people who are blind:
"Did you see that game?"
"See you later,"

or around people who are deaf:

"Did you hear about John?"

or around people who use wheelchairs:

"Let's walk to the store."

"Run over to the dorm to pick it up."



Examples Of Preferred Terms Regarding People With Disabilities	
Acceptable – Neutral (Always subject to change and continuing debate)	Unacceptable - Offensive
He had polio She has multiple sclerosis	He was afflicted with, stricken with, suffers from , victim of polio, multiple sclerosis, etc.
He has arthritis She has cerebral palsy	He is arthritic She is cerebral palsied , spastic
A person who has had a disability since birth, A congenital disability	Birth defect
A person who uses a wheelchair A wheelchair user	Confined to a wheelchair / wheelchair bound
She has a disability	She is crippled
A person who has a speech disability A person who is hard of hearing A person who is deaf	Dumb, deaf mute, dummy (Implies an intellectual disability occurs with a hearing loss or a speech disability)
A person who has a spinal curvature	A hunchback or a humpback
He has a mental illness. He has an emotional disability He has a psychiatric disability	He is chronically mentally ill , a nut , crazy , idiot , imbecile , moron
People of short stature	Midgets, dwarfs
A person who has a speech disability.	Mute
A person without a disability as compared to a person with a disability	Normal person, whole person, healthy person, able-bodied person as compared to a disabled person
She lives with a disability	Overcame her disability
A person who has a developmental disability or intellectual disability	Retard, retardate, mentally retarded, feebleminded, idiot
Use only when a person is actually ill.	Sick
Use only when a person is actively being seen or treated by a health care provider	Stroke patient , multiple sclerosis patient
Seizure	Fit
Older people with disabilities	Frail
Person with environmental sensitivities	Bubble Person

Other words to avoid because they are negative, reinforce stereotypes and evoke pity include:

Other Words to Avoid	
Abnormal	Maimed
Burden	Misshapen
Disfigured	Spaz
Invalid	Unfortunate
Lame	

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