

Basic Disability Etiquette Tips

The following tips are things to keep in mind when interacting with people with disabilities. Remember each person is an individual. Never assume you know what a person with a disability wants or needs.

- If offering any assistance, always wait for a response and then follow the individual's instructions.
- When talking to a person with a disability, talk directly to that individual, not the friend, companion or Sign Language interpreter who may be present.
- Respect all assistive devices (i.e. canes, wheelchairs, crutches, communication boards) as personal property. Unless given permission, do not move, play with or use them.
- Remember that people with disabilities are interested in the same topics of conversations as non-disabled individuals.
- When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear artificial limbs can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with your left hand is an acceptable greeting.
- If talking with a person using a wheelchair for any length of time, try to place yourself at their eye level. (This is to avoid stiff necks and "talking down" to the individual.)
- Remember to show your face while talking with someone who is Deaf or hard of hearing.
- Do not shout or raise your voice unless asked to do so.
- If greeting someone who is blind or has a visual impairment, identify yourself and those who may be accompanying you.
- Do not pet or make a service dog the focus of conversation.
- Let the individual know if you move or need to end the conversation.
- When interacting with a person who is visually impaired, follow their lead. If they need assistance, they will ask.
- Allow the person to negotiate their surroundings, e.g., finding the door handle, locating a chair, etc.
- Treat adults as adults. Address people with disabilities by their first name only when extending the same familiarity to all others.