

Disability Awareness & Etiquette Tips

"Communication, Courtesy, Common Sense"

All Disabilities

- When referring to someone with a disability, use "person-first language," such as "person with a disability." Never use the word "handicap." or any other words that have derogatory meanings. "Handicapped" is outdated and unacceptable terminology.
- It's acceptable to use common expressions with individuals that seem like it may relate to their disability, such as, "see what I mean" (to someone who is blind).
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted, then listen and follow the person's instructions carefully.
- Communicate directly with the person with a disability, not with their family, friends or companions, unless they direct you to do so.

Individuals with Visual Impairments

- Always identify yourself when interacting with someone who has a visual impairment. Alert the individual when you are speaking directly to them if more than the two of you are present.
- Ask the individual how much detailed information they would like you to provide for them.
- Don't take any actions that might distract a service animal from performing its duties, such as petting or feeding, without first getting permission from the owner. A service animal is not a pet!
- Even though you are assisting the person, still describe actions you are taking with them.
- The generally accepted way to assist a person with a visual impairment is to stand beside them and offer your arm (L-shaped) closest to them, and alert them to grab it. Then, walk slightly ahead of the person using their chosen pace.

Individuals with Mobility Impairments

- Do not touch or push someone's wheelchair or grab their mobility device without their permission, since it's considered part of their personal space.
- Be aware of the need for a clear path of travel (accessible route) throughout the area, as well as location of accessible features (entrances, restrooms, seating) for individuals using a mobility device.

Individuals with Speech Impairments

- Listen attentively when talking with people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish. You may need to ask them questions that require a "yes or no" response to make sure you understood correctly.
- Writing notes or pointing to objects, signage or printed materials may be an effective way to communicate with individuals who are speech impaired..

Individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

- Using gestures and basic signs may be a way to enhance your communication. Writing simple notes or pointing to objects, signage or printed material can be effective, too.
- Speak directly to the person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present.
- Always face the individual who is deaf or hard of hearing when you are speaking, since they may be reading your lips.

Individuals with Cognitive Disabilities

- Provide information to the individual in a short, concise manner. The language used should be simple and easy to understand, without being condescending.
- Using visual images of information can allow for effective communication.

Be familiar with the process of obtaining materials in accessible formats (such as Braille) and securing sign language interpreters, upon advance notice.