

Etiquette & Behavior for Relating to Persons with Disabilities

1. Remember that a person who has a disability is a person -- like anyone else.
2. Relax. If you don't know what to do or say, allow the person who has a disability to help put you at ease.
3. Do not assume anything. If you have a question about what to do, how to do it, what language or terminology to use, what assistance to offer, ask the person with the disability. That person should be your first and best resource.
4. Offer assistance, quietly and tactfully, if it seems needed, but don't overdo it or insist on it or make a scene. Respect the person's right to reject help or to indicate the kind of help needed.
5. If, for whatever reason, you cannot assist in the way that is asked, be open in discussing this with the person with the disability. You have a right to set limits on what you can and cannot do. Your relationship with a person with a disability should be, like any other relationship, a reciprocal one.
6. If there is time and opportunity, explore your mutual interests in a friendly way. The person probably has many interests besides those connected with the disability and the job.
7. Talk about the disability if it comes up naturally, without prying. Be guided by the wishes of the person with the disability.
8. Appreciate what the person can do. Remember that difficulties the person may be facing may stem more from society's attitudes and barriers than from the disability itself.
9. Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to get things said or done. Let the person set the pace in walking or talking.
10. Speak directly to a person who has a disability. Don't consider a companion or interpreter to be a conversational go-between.
11. Don't move a wheelchair, crutches, or other mobility aids out of reach of a person who uses them.
12. Never start to push a wheelchair without first asking the occupant if you may do so.
13. Before deciding whether or not to push a wheelchair up or down a step, curb, or other obstruction, ask the person if and how he or she wants you to proceed; and be respectful of your own limitations.
14. Don't lean on a person's wheelchair when talking; it is an invasion of personal space. Don't pat a person in a wheelchair on the head; that is patronizing.
15. Give whole, unhurried attention to the person who has difficulty speaking. Don't talk for the person but give help when needed. Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting. When necessary, ask questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head.

16. Don't pretend to understand a person with a speech difference when you do not. Don't be afraid to let the person know that you do not understand. Be patient, not only with the person with the disability but also with yourself.

17. Speak calmly, slowly, and distinctly to a person who has a hearing problem or other difficulty understanding. Stand in front of the person, speak directly to the person, and use natural gestures to aid communication. When full understanding is doubtful, try writing notes.

18. When dining with a person who has trouble cutting meat or buttering rolls, offer to help. Explain to a person who has a visual problem where dishes, utensils, and condiments are located on the table.

19. Do not pet or otherwise distract dog guides; they are working and must not be distracted.

20. Be alert to possible existence of architectural barriers in places you may want to enter with a person who has a disability. Watch for inadequate lighting, which inhibits communication by persons who have hearing problems.

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