

Disability Awareness: ETIQUETTE



Presented by
INDEPENDENT LIVING, INC.
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“... With our hearts let us see, with your hands let us break every chain. Then, indeed, shall we know a better and nobler humanity.”

Helen Keller, 1913

**The National Organization on
Disability (NOD) reports that
more than 49 million
Americans
have disabilities.**

**An estimated 2.7 million New
Yorkers have significant
disabilities
(14 % of state population or
about 1 person in 7)**

The challenges are the same for
all persons with disabilities...

STIGMA

STEREOTYPING

DISCRIMINATION

UNDEREMPLOYMENT

LACK OF TRANSPORTATION

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We have come to recognize and embrace disability as a part of the human condition.



We're all in this together...



All of us have been in situations where **we don't know what to say or do.**

❖ You notice a person who is **blind** and needs help. **How do you make your presence known?**

❖ You meet **someone who uses a wheelchair**. **Where should you stand while talking?**

When interacting with people with disabilities, always remember that they are people first!



Why Practice Disability Etiquette?

- ❖ Disability sensitivity makes **good business sense**.
- ❖ Practicing disability etiquette is an easy way to **make people with disabilities feel welcome**. When disability etiquette is used, everyone can feel more comfortable and interact more productively & effectively.

The Basics

Ask before you help!

Don't assume everyone with a disability needs assistance.

Adults with disabilities want to be treated as independent people.

Offer assistance only if someone appears to need it.

If you do assist someone, ask how you should assist before acting.

Be Sensitive About Physical Contact.

- Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance. **Grabbing them could knock them off balance.**
- **Avoid patting a person on the head** or touching their wheelchair, scooter or cane. People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.



Think Before You Speak.

- Always **speak directly to the person with a disability**, not to their companion or interpreter, and in a **professional, non-condescending manner**.
- Respect privacy.

Don't Make Assumptions.

People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. **Don't make decisions for them** (based upon your own attitudes, preferences and experiences).

How we say what we say... putting the **PERSON FIRST!**

Say “**Person with a disability**” rather than
“disabled person,”

Say “People with disabilities” rather than
“the disabled,”

And for specific disabilities, say “**Person
with a psychiatric disability,**” or “**Person
who has Cerebral Palsy.**”

If you aren't sure what words
to use, **just ask.**

And **NEVER USE** outdated language that emphasizes, weaknesses, differences and limitations...

Handicapped

Crippled

Physically Challenged

Differently-abled

Wheelchair Bound

Victim or Sufferer

**Here are some other things to
keep in mind...**



Wheelchair users are PEOPLE and not EQUIPMENT.

- Don't ask them to hold your coat!
- Don't push or touch a person's wheelchair; it is part of their personal space.
- When talking to someone who uses a wheelchair, sit at their level. If that's not possible, stand at a slight distance.

- **Be aware of reach limits.** Place items within their grasp.
- If a service **counter is too high**, step around it to provide better service.
- Keep ramps and wheelchair accessible doors to your building open and unblocked.
- **Provide a clear path of travel.**



People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired:

- Many people who are blind are **competent to travel** unassisted, though they **may use a cane or guide dog**.
- Always remember **to Identify yourself before you make physical contact** with a person who is blind.

- People who are blind use their arms for balance, so **offer your arm – don't take theirs** – if they need to be guided.
- If the person has a guide dog, **walk on the side opposite the guide dog.**
- As you walk, **describe the setting, noting any obstacles**, such as stairs, cracks in the sidewalk, protruding objects.
- If giving a warning, be specific. Don't just yell "Look Out!"

- Give specific directions. Do not use visual information. (*Turn right at the end of the street as opposed to Turn right at the convenience store.*).
- If you leave someone who is blind, let them know.
- **Don't pet or touch guide dogs.**
- Offer to read written information (menus, bank statements, etc...).

People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing:

- American Sign Language (ASL) is an entirely different language from English, with its own syntax.
- ▣ Speech reading is difficult for people who are Deaf if their first language is ASL because the majority of sounds in English are formed inside the mouth, and it's hard to speech (lip) read a second language.

- When an exchange of information is complex, use a qualified sign language interpreter.
- For simple interactions, like ordering in a restaurant, generally writing back and forth is o.k.
- Follow the person's cues to find out if they prefer sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking.
- When using an interpreter, **look directly at the person who is Deaf and maintain eye contact.**

- Before speaking to a person who is Deaf, make sure you **get their attention** (wave your hand, flicker the lights, tap them on the shoulder.).
- When talking, face the person.
- Speak clearly.
- **There is no need to shout** at a person who is Deaf or hard of hearing.

- People who are Deaf often use devices called Video Phones – VP and Teletypewriters – TTY.
- A Video Phone is the visual equivalent of a telephone that uses high speed internet access, a web cam or VP camera box and a monitor.
- A TTY is a small device with a keyboard, a paper printer, a visual display screen and acoustic couplers (for the telephone receiver).
- State Relay Services allow VP and TTY users to communicate with other non- VP or TTY users.



People With Speech Disabilities:

- A person who has had a stroke, is severely hard of hearing or has a stammer or other type of speech disability may be difficult to understand.
- Give such individuals your full attention.
- Don't interrupt them or try to finish their sentences.

- If you don't understand, tell them and ask if they can **repeat** themselves.
- If after repeating you still don't understand, ask if they can **write it down**.
- Don't tease or laugh.



People With Cerebral Palsy:

- As a result of injury to the Central Nervous System, people with cerebral palsy (CP) have difficulty controlling their muscles. **Not all people with CP have cognitive impairments.**
- **Be patient and pay close attention to what they are saying.**
- A person with CP may appear drunk or sick (slurred speech). **Get the facts before acting on a first impression.**

Tourette Syndrome:

- People with Tourette Syndrome may make vocalizations or gestures that they cannot control. These may include ethnic slurs or obscene words.
- If a person with Tourette makes vocalizations during a conversation, simply wait for them to finish, then calmly continue.
- The more someone tries to contain these urges, the more the urges build up.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS):

- People with MCS react to toxins in the air. Fumes from cleaning products, perfume, air freshener, etc...can trigger a reaction.
- Try to avoid spray-cleaning tables/furniture at work while others are around.
- If you must, spray the cloth rather than the air.
- Ask staff to go lightly on perfume, cologne, etc...
- Maintain good ventilation and enforce “No-Smoking” regulations.

Epilepsy (Seizure Disorders):

- Epilepsy is a neurological condition characterized by seizures which happen when the electrical system of the brain malfunctions. The seizures may be convulsive or the person may appear to be in a trance.
- If a person has a seizure, you cannot do anything to stop it.

- If they have fallen, make sure their head is protected and wait for the seizure to end.



HIV & AIDS:

- People with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or Autoimmune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) have impaired immune systems.
- You can't catch HIV from casual contact such as shaking hands.
- If you have a respiratory or other infection, be conscious of not putting someone else at risk.

Psychiatric Disabilities:

- People with psychiatric disabilities may have difficulty coping with the stresses of daily life. Because this is often a **hidden disability**, chances are that you will not even realize someone has a psychiatric disability.
- Stress can affect the person's ability to function.

- People with psychiatric disabilities have different ways of handling their disability.
- **In a crisis, stay calm and supportive.** Ask if you can retrieve medication or someone else who might be of assistance.



Cognitive Disabilities - Mental Retardation:

- People with mental retardation learn slowly.
- Speak to the person in clear, simple sentences and repeat in different ways as needed.
- Don't use baby talk.
- Remember that the adult with mental retardation can make decisions for themselves.



Cognitive Disabilities - Learning Disabilities:

- Learning Disabilities are life-long conditions that interfere with a person's ability to receive, express or process information.
- People with **dyslexia have trouble reading written information. Give them verbal explanations** and allow extra time for reading.
- Write down instructions.
- **Ask how you can best relay information!**

Traumatic Brain Injury:

- People with traumatic brain injury have had damage to the brain usually as the result of trauma, such as an accident.
- Speak clearly, be patient.
- Short-term memory issues may require frequent reinforcement of information.

In Closing...

Don't focus on the disability, but on the individual and the issue at hand.

Thank You!



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