

Many of us grew up in a time when we were taught to look away when we saw a person with a disability. Those days are over and, with the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, our society is learning to welcome people with disabilities into mainstream as productive individuals. This brochure can help you be a part of that process.

ACCESS RESOURCES

You don't have to feel awkward when dealing with a person who has a disability. This page provides some basic tips for you to follow. And if you are ever unsure about what to do or say with a person who has a disability, just ask!

Be Yourself

As in any new situation, everyone will feel more comfortable if you relax.

Meeting Someone

People who use wheelchairs may have a variety of disabilities. Some have use of their arms and some do not. When you meet someone, extend your hand to shake if that is what you normally do. A person who cannot shake hands will let you know. He or she will appreciate being treated in a normal way. If you are meeting a blind person, identify yourself. If you have met before, remind him of the context; he won't have the visual clues to jog his memory.

Helping

Do not automatically give assistance; ask first if the person wants help. Follow the person's cues, and ask if you are not sure. Be the assistant, not the director; let a blind person hold your arm and follow you. And don't be offended if someone refuses your offer of assistance. It's his or her choice to be as independent as they can be.

Communication

Talk directly to the person, not to an aide, friend, or interpreter. If the person has a speech impairment, listen carefully and patiently. Ask him to repeat if you don't understand. If the person doesn't understand you when you speak, try again. Don't let him think your communication with him is not worthwhile to you. If the person is deaf or hard of hearing, follow his or her lead; use gestures or write. If the person uses a wheelchair, sit and converse at his level.

Socializing

Do not leave a person with a disability out of a conversation or activity because you feel uncomfortable or fear that he/she will feel uncomfortable. Include him or her as you would anyone else. He or she knows what they can do and want to do; let it be their decision whether or not to participate.

Disability

Treat the person as an individual. Don't assume that the person's disability is all he can talk about or is interested in. Find a topic of small talk, the way you would with anyone. Don't treat the person as a disability.

Environments

Be sensitive about the setting. A noisy or dark environment, or people talking simultaneously, might make it difficult for people with a vision, speech, or hearing disability to participate in a conversation. Be aware of clear paths of travel for people who use wheelchairs or are blind. Describe going-on and surroundings (especially obstacles) to blind person. A person with chemical sensitivity may have a reaction to smoke, perfume, cleaning products, or other forms of toxins in the environment.

Touching

Do not pet guide dogs, and do not touch a person with a disability unless there is a good reason (such as shaking hands in greeting or if the person has requested assistance). However, you may gently touch a deaf person to get his attention. Never push a person's wheelchair without his or her permission. Please do not recoil if you meet a person with AIDS; shake his hand as you would anyone. You can't get AIDS by touching. And your acceptance means a lot.

Hidden Disabilities

Not all disabilities are apparent. A person may have trouble following a conversation, may not respond when you call or wave, may make a request that seems strange to you, or may say or do something that seems inappropriate. The person may have a hidden disability, such as low vision, a hearing or learning disability, traumatic brain injury, mental retardation, or mental illness. Don't make assumptions about the person or his or her disability. Be open-minded.

Learning More

Lack of knowledge or misinformation may lead you to shy away from interacting with persons with certain disabilities. Preconceptions about mental illness, AIDS, cerebral palsy, Tourettes Syndrome and other disabilities often lead to a lack of acceptance by those around the person. Remember that we are all complex human beings; a disability is just one aspect of a person. Learning more about the disability may alleviate your fears and pave the way for you to see the person for whom he or she is.

Interacting with People with Disabilities

Overall attitude and approach to persons with disabilities

As you meet people with various physical disabilities, you will likely find that you are apprehensive

about how you should behave towards that individual. Every person is different and some will find it easy to work with such individuals, whereas others will find it difficult adjusting to working with people with physical disabilities. Always remember that a person with a disability is a person. He or she is like anyone else, except for the special limitations of their disability.

The most important thing is to be honest

If you do not understand someone because they have difficulty with their speech, or they use some form of communication aid, please do not assume that they do not understand. If you have difficulty understanding them, then admit it, and try to get someone to translate for you. People in such situations will not get upset if you are honest, and in time, you will learn to understand what they are saying to you.

How to help

- A. Introduce yourself and offer assistance.
- B. Don't be offended if your help is not needed.
- C. Ask how you can help and listen for instructions.
- D. Be courteous, but NOT condescending.
- E. Assist disabled persons when necessary or requested, but do not discourage their active participation.
- F. Allow a person DIGNITY to do what he or she wants to do for him or herself.

Things to remember

- A. Treat people as you would like to be treated yourself.
- B. Do not show pity for a person in a wheelchair. It makes them feel demoralized.
- C. People with disabilities are NOT alike and have a wide variety of skills and personalities. We are all individuals.
- D. Most disabled people are not sick, incompetent, dependent, unintelligent or contagious.
- E. The wheelchair is part of the user's personal space. It is not a leaning post.

When you meet a non-vocal person

- A. Some non-vocal people prefer to write their communications down on paper, some use sign-language and some use a sign board. These methods can be slow and require patience and concentration. You may have to handle much of the conversation yourself
 - B. Try to keep in mind that communication is the important thing
 - C. You might try using more yes/no questions
 - D. If possible, fill in the gaps when you can so the non-vocal person will need to expend less energy getting the message across

Suggestions for communicating with people using communication aides

- A. Expect non-verbal people to communicate
- B. Ask the person to show how they indicate "yes". Once you have noted this, ask them how they indicate "no".
- C. Find out if they:
 - A. feel like talking to you, and
 - B. have the time to talk with you
- D. If there are instructions visible for communicating with this person, take a moment to read them
- E. Make sure the person's communication system is within their reach
- F. Find out how the person "points" (with their finger, eyes, fist, etc.)
- G. Ask one question at a time
- H. Ask open-ended, rather than yes/no questions, whenever appropriate
- I. Wait for a response

<p>The following words have strong negative connotations:</p> <p><u>Do Not Use:</u></p>	<p>The following words are more affirmative and reflect a more positive attitude:</p> <p><u>Words with Dignity</u></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● handicap ● the handicapped ● crippled with ● victim ● spastic ● patient (except in hospital) ● invalid ● paralytic ● stricken with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● physically disabled ● person with a disability ● person who has multiple sclerosis ● person who has muscular dystrophy ● paraplegic (person with limited or no use of lower limbs) ● quadriplegic (person with limited or no use of all four limbs) ● person who has cerebral palsy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● person who had polio ● person with mental retardation ● person with mental disability ● person who is blind ● person who has a speech impairment ● person with a learning disability
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● birth defect ● inflicted ● afflicted/afflicted by ● deformed/deformed by ● incapacitated ● poor ● unfortunate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● caused by "_____" ● disabled since birth ● born with "_____" 	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● deaf and dumb ● deaf mute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● deaf person ● pre-lingually (deaf at birth) deaf ● post-lingually (deaf after birth) deaf ● deaf/profoundly deaf (no hearing capability) ● hearing-impaired (some hearing capability) 	
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● confined to a wheelchair ● restricted to a wheelchair ● wheelchair bound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● person in a wheelchair ● person who uses a wheelchair ● person who walks with crutches <p>Explanation: Crutches, walkers, and wheelchairs are mobility aids. Without the use of these mobility aids, the person is restricted from participation in their community.</p>	
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<p>normal (acceptable only for quoting statistics)</p>	<p>nondisabled (referring to nondisabled persons as normal insinuates that disabled persons are abnormal)</p>	

Basic Guidelines: Make reference to the person first, then the disability, i.e., "a person with a disability" rather than a "disabled person." However, the latter is acceptable in the interest of conserving print space or saving announcing time. Use an adjective as a description, not a category or priority, i.e., "the architect in the wheelchair" rather than "the wheelchair architect."