



## Disability Etiquette Quick Tips

### When communicating with a person who experiences a disability that impacts hearing

1. Speak clearly and distinctly, but don't exaggerate.
2. Use normal speech. Don't shout.
3. Provide a clear view of your mouth.
4. Speak directly to the individual, not to the interpreter.
5. If asked to repeat yourself, be patient and honor the request. Don't say "nothing" or "never mind" because it implies the person isn't worth the effort.

### When communicating with a person who experiences a disability that impacts communication

1. If you are having trouble understanding the speech of an individual free to ask him/her to repeat. If that doesn't work, then use paper and pen.
2. Don't pretend to understand if you don't.

### When communicating with a person who experiences a disability that impacts mobility

1. Offer help, but wait until it is accepted.
2. Treat a person with a disability as a healthy person.
3. Speak directly to the individual, not to a companion.
4. Don't use language like "wheelchair bound" because in fact a wheelchair is a device that provides greater freedom for individuals with limited mobility.

### When communicating with a person who experiences a disability that impacts vision

1. Offer help, but wait until it is accepted.
2. If you are helping, and aren't sure what to do, ask.
3. A gentle touch on the elbow will indicate to a person who is blind that you are speaking to him/her.
4. If you are walking with a person who is blind, don't take that person's arm, rather offer your arm.
5. Never pet a guide dog, except during "off-duty" hours. Even then, you should ask the owner first.
6. Don't worry about substituting words for "see" or "look" as in "I'll see you later."

### Remember:

Individuals with disabilities are people first, and like everyone, they are defined, not by one, but by a variety of characteristics. Disability need not be a handicap unless the environment produces physical or attitudinal barriers.

### Universal Design

"the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design."

More information on UD can be shared by Disability Services at department or division meetings on request.

## Disability Myths and Facts

**Myth:** People with disabilities are handicapped.

**Fact:** The terms "disabled" and "handicapped" are often used interchangeably. In fact, the latter term carries negative connotations, indicating that a disability prevents someone from being a full functioning member of society. A disability does not always present a handicap; rather it often means that a person with a disability may do something a little differently from a nondisabled person, but with the same result and with equal participation.

**Myth:** The disabled should be protected from failing.

**Fact:** People with disabilities have a right to participate in the full range of human experiences – including success and failure. Employers and educators should have the same expectations of, and work requirements for, all employees and students.

**Myth:** Disability is a constantly frustrating tragedy. People with disabilities are courageous, brave, and inspirational by being able to overcome their disabilities.

**Fact:** Disability is an inconvenience. Most people with disabilities do not sit around and ponder their disability all the time. They simply carry on their lives. Individuals with disabilities cannot be stereotyped. Each person is an individual personality and, as such, each person will respond to adversity in their own ways. Some even find adversity actually makes them stronger.

**Myth:** Nondisabled people are disgusted by disability.

**Fact:** Because our society places such importance on youth and beauty, many nondisabled people have mixed emotions when they meet someone who is "different." What may be interpreted as disgust may actually be feelings of guilt, curiosity, fear, or sympathy. A nondisabled person who fears saying the "wrong" thing to a person with a disability may avoid communication. A person with a disability may feel shunned. The more we recognize disability as part of diversity and encourage interaction, the more we can reduce stigma.

**Myth:** Individuals who experience disabilities lead totally different lives than others.

**Fact:** Disability cuts through all segments of society. People with disabilities come from all backgrounds. It is impossible to neatly separate the two groups. People with disabilities go to work, pay taxes, go out to dinner, go shopping, raise families, etc.