

Appropriate Language

Appropriate interaction and communication with or about people with disabilities.

- ➔ **Speak directly to the person with a disability, not their companion or interpreter.**
- ➔ **Introduce yourself and ask, “How may I assist you?” Then wait for instructions on the help needed and follow the directions.**
- ➔ **Allow people to remain as independent as possible. If the person does not want or need help, take “no” for answer without feeling offended.**
- ➔ **Do not refer to a person’s disability unless it is relevant.**
- ➔ **Most people with disabilities prefer “person-first” terminology such as “person who is blind” or “people with disabilities” since this acknowledges them as people first rather than their disability.**
- ➔ **Avoid referring to groups of people by their condition or disability such as “the blind” or “the deaf.”**
- ➔ **Use “disabled,” “disability” or “accessible” rather than “handicapped.”**
- ➔ **Avoid condescending euphemisms such as “differently abled,” “physically challenged,” “mentally different” or “handicapable.”**
- ➔ **Respect the privacy and individual preferences of people.**
- ➔ **Never say anything that you would not want said to or about yourself.**

Do say

- ◆ person with a disability, or has a disability, people with disabilities
- ◆ non-disabled, able-bodied
- ◆ uses wheelchair/ assistive device, e.g., wheelchair, crutches, walker
- ◆ congenital disability, birth injury
- ◆ person with a physical disability
- ◆ person who is deaf, hard of hearing
- ◆ has a speech disability, unable to speak
- ◆ person who is blind, has low vision
- ◆ person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability
- ◆ person with epilepsy, seizure disorder
- ◆ person with a psychiatric disability
- ◆ person of short stature, little person, dwarf

Don't say

- ◆ the disabled, handicapped, physically challenged, differently abled
- ◆ normal, healthy
- ◆ wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair people
- ◆ birth defect, birth affliction
- ◆ crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, gimp
- ◆ the deaf, hearing impaired, deaf mute
- ◆ has a speech defect, is dumb
- ◆ the blind, blind people, visually impaired
- ◆ stupid, retard, slow, mentally deficient, mentally challenged
- ◆ epileptic, has fits, spastic
- ◆ crazy, nuts, loony
- ◆ midget

Common Courtesies

- **Greet individuals with disabilities as you would any other customer**, whether it's with a smile, handshake or self-introduction.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take a person with a disability to get things done or said. **Let the person set the pace** in walking and talking.
- When talking to someone who speaks slowly or with great effort, **don't pretend** to understand. Politely ask them to repeat what you did not understand or **ask if writing notes would be okay**.
- The **wheelchair is part of the individual's personal space**: don't lean or put anything on it. If conversing for more than a few minutes, **place yourself at their eye level** to spare both of you a stiff neck.
- When speaking with a person with vision loss, always remember to **identify yourself, introduce others** with you and **indicate when you move** from one place to another and when the conversation is at an end.
- When acting as a sighted guide, **allow the person to take your arm**. This will enable them to easily follow your lead, even up or down curbs or stairs. **Describe barriers** you encounter as well as features along the route.
- **Use specific directions/distances**, such as left/3 steps away, when giving directions to someone with vision loss.
- Always face a person who is deaf or hard of hearing and, when in doubt, ask if it's OK to write notes. **Speaking loudly does not mean you will be heard**.
- When assisting someone with an intellectual disability, **treat adults as adults**. **Use simple words and phrases** and confirm that they understood.
- **Service animals are working** and should not be touched, petted or otherwise distracted.
- **If you are ever unsure about what to say or do, JUST ASK!**

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