

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

It is important to remember that each person is different and commonly used etiquette rules do not apply to all persons with disabilities. If you are not sure about appropriate behaviors or words, the best policy is to ask the person with a disability with whom you are interacting.

GENERAL ETIQUETTE WHEN INTERACTING WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:

- ◆ When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands even if the person has limited hand use or wears an artificial limb.
- ◆ For those who cannot shake hands, touch the person on the shoulder or arm to welcome and acknowledge their presence.
- ◆ Treat adults in a manner befitting adults. For example, call a person by his or her first name only when extending that familiarity to all others present.
- ◆ When talking with a person with a disability, look at and speak directly to the person rather than through a companion who may be along.
- ◆ Offer assistance. If the offer is accepted, listen to, or accept instructions.
- ◆ It's okay to use common expressions such as "See you later" or "Got to be running along" that seem to relate to that person's disability.

PERSONS WHO HAVE A HEARING LOSS:

- ◆ Do not shout at a person with a hearing loss. Written notes may help when needed.
- ◆ To get the attention of a person with a hearing loss, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Never throw things at the person.
- ◆ Look directly at the person and speak clearly, naturally and slowly. Keep in mind that few people can read lips effectively.
- ◆ Show consideration by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping your hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking.
- ◆ If an interpreter is present, speak directly to the person by maintaining eye contact with him/her, not the interpreter.

PERSONS IN WHEELCHAIRS:

- ◆ When talking with a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, sit down in a chair if possible.
- ◆ When giving directions, consider how distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs, and steep hills will affect the person's commute.
- ◆ Never patronize people using wheelchairs by patting them on the head.
- ◆ When addressing a person who uses a wheelchair, never lean on the person's wheelchair. The chair is part of the space that belongs to the person.

PERSONS WITH A VISUAL LOSS:

- ◆ Never pet a service animal without first getting the permission of the owner. The service animal is "working," and by petting it you can distract it from its responsibilities to the owner.
- ◆ When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. Say, for example, "On my right is Penelope Potts."
- ◆ When conversing in a group, give a vocal cue by announcing the name of the person to whom you are speaking.
- ◆ Speak in a normal tone of voice, indicate in advance when you will be moving from one place to another, and let it be known when the conversation is at an end.
- ◆ Do not shout at a person who is blind or visually impaired.
- ◆ Use specifics such as "left a hundred feet" or "right two yards" when directing a person with a visual impairment.
- ◆ Allow a person with a visual impairment to take your arm (at or about the elbow). This will enable you to guide rather than propel or lead the person.

PERSONS WITH SPEECH DIFFICULTIES:

- ◆ Listen attentively when you're talking to a person who has a speech impairment.
- ◆ Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting.
- ◆ Exercise patience rather than attempting to speak for a person with speech difficulty (for example, do not interrupt the person to finish his/her statement).
- ◆ When necessary ask short questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head.
- ◆ Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so.