

## DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

*"Sensitivity toward people with disabilities is not only in the spirit of ADA, it makes sense."*

[United Spinal Association](#)

## Disability Etiquette

### The Basics

**Ask before you help.** Just because someone has a disability, don't assume they need or want help.

**Be sensitive about physical contact.** Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance. Grabbing them (even to assist) could knock them off balance.

**Think before you speak.** Always speak and look directly at a person with a disability, not to their companion, aide or sign-language interpreter.

**Don't make assumptions.** People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. Don't make decisions for them about their participation in any activity. Depending on the situation, it could be a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act to exclude someone because of a presumption about their disability.

**Respond graciously to requests.** When a person with a disability requests an accommodation, it is not a complaint and should not be viewed adversely. Reasonable accommodation procedures should be adhered to.

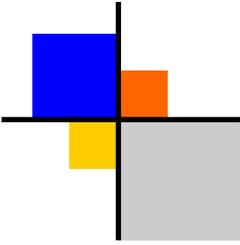
### Terminology Tips

**Put the person first.** Say "person with a disability" rather than "disabled person." This is sometimes referred to as "people first language."

**Avoid outdated terms like "handicapped" or "crippled".** Many people with disabilities dislike jargon such as "physically challenged" or "differently disabled." Say "wheelchair user," rather than "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair bound".

**It is ok to say expressions like** "It was good to see you" and "See you later" to a person who is blind; they use these expressions themselves all the time.

**Many people who are Deaf may be offended by the term "hearing impaired"** Others may not object, but it is generally safe to refer to a person with hearing loss but who can speak as "hard of hearing."



## Disability Etiquette (cont)

**Wheelchair users are people, not equipment.** Don't lean over someone in a wheelchair to shake another person's hand or ask a wheelchair user to hold your coat. Placing your drink on the desktop attached to someone's wheelchair is a definite no-no.

**Don't push or touch a person's wheelchair,** it is a part of their personal space. Without securing the proper instructions you may inadvertently cause them to tumble out of the chair.

**Recognizing that a person has a disability or what type of disability they have may not be obvious.** If someone appears to need assistance ask "may I assist you?"

**If a person has a guide dog, walk on the side opposite of the dog.** Don't touch the person's cane or guide dog. The dog is working and needs to concentrate.

**Be aware that American Sign Language (ASL)** is an entirely different language from English! Speech reading (lip reading) is difficult since the first language is ASL for the deaf and hard of hearing. The majority of sounds in English are formed in the mouth which increases the difficulty of speech reading. Look directly at the person and talk slowly. Do not mumble.

**People with speech disabilities may be difficult to understand.** Give the person your full attention. Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentence. If you have trouble understanding, just ask them to repeat or you can repeat for verification.

**Some people who may not have limited life activities but who look different are treated as if they have a disability because of their appearance.** People with facial differences, skin conditions, extremely above or below average height or weight, exhibiting tremors, etc. have the frequent experience of people staring at them, looking away or looking through them. Don't contribute to stigmatizing people who look different. In the appropriate situations, strike up a conversation with the person or try to include them in group conversations.

"If all you see is the disability...you might be missing a lot. People with disabilities are just people" – Meredith Vieira, NBC News




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*"People with disabilities are individuals; don't make them into disability heroes or victims. Treat them as individuals."*

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