



Disability Etiquette

General Considerations for All Disabilities

- **SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE INDIVIDUAL:** Always speak directly to the individual with a disability, not to their companion or language interpreter.
- **DON'T FOCUS ON THE DISABILITY:** Do not focus on the person's disability. A person's disability is just one aspect of who they are. People with disabilities have the same interests and achievements as the population at large.
- **OFFER TO SHAKE HANDS:** When introduced to a person with a disability, you may offer to shake hands. It is acceptable to shake with the left hand. Some individuals may decline your offer.
- **IF YOU ARE NOT SURE, ASK QUESTIONS:** If you are unsure about what an appropriate action should be, ask the person what he or she prefers. A person with a disability would much rather be asked questions about what the appropriate protocol is rather than be caught in an uncomfortable situation.
- **TREAT DISABLED ADULTS AS YOU WOULD ANY OTHER ADULT:** Adults with disabilities appreciate the same respect and treatment as any non-disabled adult. Therefore, only use first names when extending that same level of familiarity to others who are present and for close friends. Never patronize people with disabilities or treat them like they have less intelligence or capability.
- **DON'T EXCLUDE PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FROM ACTIVITIES:** Do not exclude persons with disabilities from any social or work-related activity because you think it would be too difficult for them to participate.
- **MAKE CONVERSATION:** People with disabilities have the same interests as non-disabled people. Make conversation as you would with anyone else. Don't worry about using common phrases such as "See you later" or "I've got to be running along".
- **DO NOT ASK ABOUT A PERSON'S DISABILITY:** Avoid asking overly personal questions about a person's disability. If you do ask questions, be sensitive and show respect. Do not insist on pursuing the questioning if the person wishes not to discuss it.
- **SPEAK WITH A NORMAL TONE OF VOICE:** There is no need to speak loudly regardless of a person's disability. If someone needs for you to speak in a louder voice, he or she will let you know.
- **RESPECT PERSONAL PROPERTY:** Wheelchairs, crutches, canes, communication boards, or any other assistive devices, are personal property of the individual. Unless given permission, do not touch, use or play with any personal items of a person with a disability.
- **BE RESPECTFUL OF PUBLIC DISABILITY ACCOMMODATIONS:** Be respectful of the rights of people with disabilities to use disabled parking and special seating on buses and subways.
- **IT IS ALL RIGHT IF YOU MAKE A MISTAKE:** When a mistake is made, just apologize and correct the problem, learn from the mistake and move on. Sincerity is the key to a positive interaction with anyone.