



Basic Disability Etiquette Tips

From an early age, we learn to communicate and interact with others by being taught by our parents and observing adult role models. We learn to behave in a courteous, friendly, and respectful manner. When we meet an adult or child with a disability, the rules of courteous, respectful interactions do not change. The most important thing is to see the person for who they are, not as the disability that they have. Using person first language, such as saying a person with a vision impairment instead of a blind person, helps us focus on the person and not their disability. Common sense and respect can guide us in interactions with people with all disabilities. The following tips can be used in specific situations.

Basic interactions

- Treat adults as adults, and children in an age appropriate manner
- Use first names only if it would be appropriate for anyone in the situation
- Look at the person you are speaking to, even if they have a friend, aide, or interpreter present
- Respect assistive technology such as canes, walkers, and communication boards; they are personal property and are not to be touched or moved unless asked (this includes service animals)
- Do not be afraid to ask if someone would like some help
- If you offer assistance, wait for an answer before acting
- Ask for instructions as to how you can help
- If speech is impaired, be patient and allow a person the time they need to respond
- Do not try to guess at or finish what someone is saying

Mobility impairments

- Don't make assumptions based on appearance
- A wheelchair is personal property, do not lean on it or use it to carry your things
- It is respectful to move your body to be at eye level to someone seated in a wheelchair if you are talking for a length of time
- Allow the person to navigate their environment themselves unless they ask for help

Vision and hearing impairments

- Do not speak more loudly unless you are asked to do so
- Make sure that someone who may be hard of hearing or deaf can see your face, in case they are a lip reader
- Find out if there is a preferred method of communication
- Identify yourself before speaking to someone with a vision impairment
- Let the person know if you are going to move or need to end the conversation

Remember that a person or child with a disability is a person first, and are interested in a variety of conversations and topics, just like you. Applying these disability etiquette tips to your interactions is an important step in making people of all abilities feel welcome and included.

