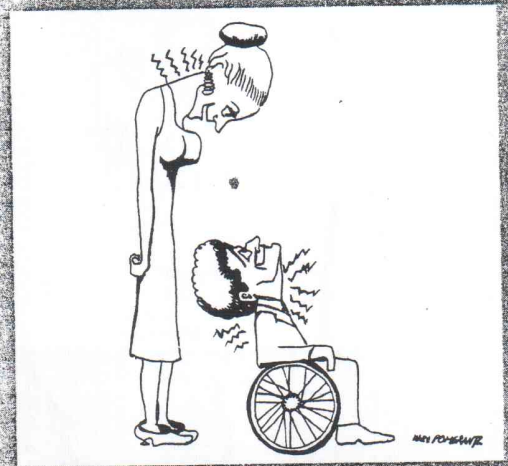


Disability Etiquette



Preferred etiquette when meeting, introducing, writing about, assisting or enjoying the company of a person who has a disability.

Some common courtesies suggested by your Easter Seal Society.



General Behavior

- ☐ Leaning or hanging on a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the body space of the person who uses it. Don't hang on it!
- ☐ When offering assistance to a person with a visual impairment, allow the person to take your arm. This will enable you to guide rather than propel or lead the person.
- ☐ Treat adults in a manner befitting adults. Call a person by his or her first name only when extending that familiarity to all others present. Do not patronize people in wheelchairs by patting them on the head. Reserve this sign of affection for children even though a wheelchair user's head temptingly rests at about the same height as a child's.



Conversation

- ☐ When talking with a person who has a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion who may be along.
- ☐ Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions, such as "See you later," or "Got to be *running* along," that seem to relate to the person's disability.
- ☐ To get the attention of a person who has a hearing problem, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. Not all persons with hearing impairments can lip-read. Those who do will rely on facial expressions and other body language to help in understanding. Show consideration by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping your hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking. Keep mustaches well-trimmed. Shouting won't help. Written notes will.
- ☐ When talking with a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, place yourself at the wheelchair user's eye level to spare both of you a stiff neck.
- ☐ 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, remember to say the name of the person to whom you are speaking to give vocal cues. Speak in a consistent tone of voice, indicate when you move from one place to another, and let it be known when the conversation is at an end.
- ☐ Give whole, unhurried attention when you're talking to a person who has difficulty speaking. Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting, be patient rather than speak for the person. 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. Repeat what you understand. The person's reactions will clue you in and guide you to understanding.



Common Courtesies

- ☐ Offer assistance to a person with a disability if you feel like it, but wait until your offer is accepted BEFORE you help, and listen to any instructions the person may want to give.
- ☐ When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs, and steep hills.
- ☐ Use specifics such as "left a hundred feet" or "right two yards" when directing a person with a visual impairment.
- ☐ Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to get things done or said. Let the person set the pace in walking and talking.
- ☐ When planning events involving persons with disabilities consider their needs ahead of time. If an insurmountable barrier exists, let them know about it prior to the event.



Portrayal

- ☐ Because a disabling condition may or may not be handicapping, use the word "disability" rather than the word "handicap."
- ☐ Place the person BEFORE the disability out of respect for individual uniqueness and worth. Say "person with a disability" or "individual who has a disability" rather than "disabled person" or "disabled individual."
- ☐ Because a person is not a condition, avoid referring to an individual by the condition he or she has, such as "a postpolio, a C.P. or an epileptic." Say, instead, a person who... "has/had polio," "has cerebral palsy," or "has epilepsy," etc.
- ☐ Refrain from using the word "disabled" as a noun, since usage implies a state of separateness or total disability. "The disabled" do not constitute a group apart.
- ☐ When writing about people with disabilities, choose words that carry positive, nonjudgmental connotations. Avoid words such as the following:
 - VICTIM—say person who has/person who experienced/person with.
 - CRIPPLE/CRIPPLED/THE CRIPPLED—say person with a disability/individual with a disability caused by or as a result of...
 - AFFLICTED BY/AFFLICTED WITH—say the person has.
 - INVALID (literally means not valid)—say the person who has a disability resulting from or caused by.
 - WHEELCHAIR BOUND—say uses a wheelchair.
 - HOMEBOUND EMPLOYMENT—say employed in the home.
 - UNFORTUNATE, PITIFUL, POOR, DEAF AND DUMB, CRIP, DEFORMED, BLIND AS A BAT and any other words or cliches that are judgmental or stereotyping. NO replacements.
- ☐ Avoid attaching labels to people, with or without disabilities. For example, the word "normal" is acceptable when referring to statistical norms or averages but not as a label for a person who has no disability.
- ☐ When called on to depict people with disabilities, emphasize achievements, abilities, and individual qualities. Show people in the least restrictive environment, participating in the mainstream of all aspects of society. Portray people with disabilities as parents, community leaders, employees, consumers, athletes, artists, performers, business owners, teachers, etc.
- ☐ Whenever possible depict the typical achiever as well as the more newsworthy superachiever.
- ☐ Emphasize the uniqueness and worth of all persons rather than the differences between people. Your concentrated efforts can do much to eliminate the "one of them" vs. "one of us" attitude that hampers proper acceptance of individuals with disabilities.

