

# Disability Etiquette

Practicing disability etiquette is an easy way to make people with disabilities feel welcome.

## The Basics

- **Ask before you help.** Just because someone has a disability, don't assume he or she needs help. Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it. And if he or she does want help, ask how before you act.
- **Respect all assistive devices** (i.e. canes, wheelchairs, crutches, communication boards) **as personal property.** Unless given permission, do not move, play with or use them. Including do not pet or make a service dog the focus of conversation.
- **Think before you speak.** When talking to a person with a disability, talk directly to that individual, not the companion or Sign Language interpreter who may be present.
  - When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear artificial limbs can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with your left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
  - If talking with a person using a wheelchair for any length of time, try to place yourself at their eye level. (This is to avoid stiff necks and "talking down" to the individual.)
  - Remember to show your face while talking with a person who is Deaf or is hard of hearing. Do not shout or raise your voice unless asked to do so.
  - If greeting a person who is blind or has low vision, identify yourself and those who may be accompanying you.
- **Respond graciously to requests.** When people who have disabilities ask for an accommodation at, it is not a complaint. It shows they feel comfortable enough in our establishment to ask for what they need. And if they get a positive response, they will probably come back again and tell their friends about the good service they received.
- **Use Words That Empower.** When speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put people first. Catch-all phrases like 'the blind,' 'the deaf,' or 'the disabled,' do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities. Here are some examples of positive and negative phrases. Note that the positive puts the person first:

<b>Affirmative Phrases:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• person with a disability</li><li>• person who has mental illness</li><li>• person with a spinal cord injury</li><li>• person who uses a wheelchair</li><li>• person without disabilities</li></ul>	<b>Negative Phrases:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the disabled, the handicapped</li><li>• stricken by, victim of, suffers from</li><li>• injured, deformed, crippled</li><li>• confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound</li><li>• normal person</li></ul>
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**For more information** or tips for specific disability populations, download the complete handbook: <http://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>.