

# Disability Awareness & Etiquette

People with disabilities may have more difficulty than others walking, moving, talking, learning, breathing, seeing, hearing, etc. We are remarkably like everyone else. We pass; we fail; we succeed; we take trips; we stay at home; we are bright; we are pains in the neck; and we're trying to get by like everyone else. When you encounter someone with a disability, please remember the following:

## **WATCH YOUR MOUTH! USE "PEOPLE FIRST" LANGUAGE**

Using language that puts the person first acknowledges that people with disabilities are human beings who should not be defined by others' perceptions of their bodies and minds. For example, instead of "blind person" say "a person who is blind" or instead of "the mentally ill" say "people who are mentally ill." Crippled, deformed, suffers from, victim of, the retarded, etc. are **NEVER** acceptable under any circumstances.

## **HEY, TALK TO ME!**

Remember to speak directly to the person with a disability. Comments such as, "does he want to..." to a personal assistant or friend accompanying a person with a disability should be avoided. When a person who is deaf is using a sign language interpreter, look at the person who is deaf and direct all questions and comments to him or her, not to the interpreter.

## **CAREFUL WHAT YOU SHARE!**

Chemicals and food do not just affect you. There are many people who have severe life threatening reactions to perfumes, cleaning agents and foods (like peanuts). Please be considerate leave your scents at home and tell people what is in the food you bring to events!

## **SHAKE OUR HANDS – DON'T PAT OUR HEADS!**

Greet people with disabilities the same way you greet anyone else. If you want to shake someone's hand who is unable to extend his or her hand, ask if you may shake it. If yes, then it's okay to lift the hand and shake. Be careful about using too much pressure.

## **SURE THEY'RE CUTE & FUZZY, BUT PLEASE DON'T PET THEM!**

Service animals have been extensively trained to assist their owners. Please remember that the animal is working, so do not pet, feed, or distract them.

## **MAY I HELP YOU?**

Don't just assume that people with disabilities need help. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted, then listen or ask for instructions.

## **WHAT DID YOU SAY?**

Some people with disabilities may have difficulty expressing ideas orally. Merely pretending to understand someone's speech hinders communication. Wait for the person to finish his or her thought rather than interrupting them. If you do not understand, ask the person to repeat the statement. Tell the person those words that you did understand and ask him or her to repeat again. If you still don't understand, it is okay to ask someone else to help you or ask the person to write down the information.

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Some information taken from:

"Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities"  
published by Research and Training Center on Independent Living for Underserved Populations  
\*“What's In a Name?” published by State of Michigan, Commission on Disability Concerns