

# Guidelines to Effective Communication

## *Effective interaction and communication with or about people with disabilities*

- ⊙ Speak directly to the person with a disability.
- ⊙ Do *not* refer to a person's disability unless it is relevant.
- ⊙ Focus on the word "accessibility" not "handicapped" or even "disability."
- ⊙ Most people with disabilities prefer "person-first" terminology such as:
  - ⊙ "person who uses a wheelchair", "person who is blind", or "people with disabilities" since this acknowledges them as people first.
  - ⊙ Avoid referring to groups of people by their condition or disability such as "the blind" or "the deaf", etc.
- ⊙ Introduce and identify yourself and always ask "How may I assist you?"
  - ⊙ Wait for instructions on the help needed and follow the instructions.
- ⊙ When assisting people who are blind or have low vision, keep them informed about their surroundings and upcoming obstacles - be descriptive.
- ⊙ Do **not** pet service animals - they are working. Escort the person or provide descriptive directions to an animal relief area if requested.
- ⊙ Never say anything that you would not want to be said to or about yourself.
- ⊙ Respect the privacy, individual preferences and independence of all people.
- ⊙ If you say something wrong, apologize and move on; do not try to deflect.

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## Acceptable Language

- ◆ Person with a disability, person who is disabled, people with disabilities, person with reduced mobility
- ◆ Non-disabled, able-bodied
- ◆ Uses a wheelchair or an assistive device
- ◆ Person with a physical disability
- ◆ Person who is deaf, hard of hearing
- ◆ Has a speech disability
- ◆ Person who is blind, has low-vision
- ◆ Person with a cognitive or intellectual developmental disability
- ◆ Person living with epilepsy
- ◆ Person with a psychiatric disability
- ◆ Little person, dwarf
- ◆ Nice, kind, enthusiastic
- ◆ or... refer to someone by their name!

## Unacceptable Language

- ◆ The disabled, handicapped, invalid, physically challenged
  - ◆ Normal or healthy
  - ◆ Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair
  - ◆ Birth defect or deformed
  - ◆ Crippled, lame, invalid, gimp
  - ◆ The deaf, hearing impaired, deaf/mute
  - ◆ Has a speech defect
  - ◆ The blind, blind people
  - ◆ Stupid, retarded, slow, subnormal, mentally challenged
  - ◆ Epileptic, has fits, spastic
  - ◆ Has issues, problems, deficiencies
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# Common Courtesies

- ◆ **Greet individuals with disabilities as you would anyone else**, whether it's with a smile, handshake, greeting, or self-introduction. Have confidence in your abilities!
- ◆ Be considerate of the extra time it might take a person with a disability to get things done or said. **Let the person set the pace** in walking and talking.
- ◆ When talking to someone who speaks slowly or with great effort, **don't pretend to understand**. Politely ask them to repeat what you did not understand or **ask if writing notes would be okay**.
- ◆ **A wheelchair is part of the individual's personal space**, do not lean on it. If conversing for more than a few minutes, **position yourself at their eye level** to spare both of you a stiff neck.
- ◆ When speaking with a person who is blind or has low vision, always remember to **identify yourself (and your position if necessary)**, **introduce other people** with you, and **indicate when you move** from one place to another and when the conversation is at an end.
- ◆ When acting as a sighted guide, **allow the person to take your arm**. This will enable them to easily follow your lead, even up or down curbs or stairs. **Be descriptive**.
  - ◆ **Use specific directions/distances**, such as left/3 steps away. You can also use clock position (clock hands) when giving directions. For example, "your water is at your 3 o'clock."
- ◆ Always face a person who is deaf or hard of hearing so that they can see your lips. **Speaking loudly does not mean you will be heard**. When in doubt, write it out.
- ◆ When assisting someone with an intellectual disability, **treat adults as adults**. **Use simple words and phrases** and confirm that they understand.
- ◆ **Service animals are working** and should not be touched, pet, or distracted.
- ◆ **If you are ever unsure about what to say or do to assist, JUST ASK!**
- ◆ Remember the WALL: **Watch, Ask, Listen, and Learn!**

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