

Disability Etiquette: Interacting with Persons with Disabilities

Person Who Uses a Wheelchair

- Don't lean on the wheelchair.
- Stand or sit at eye level with the person if the conversation lasts more than a few minutes.
- Don't push the wheelchair unless you are asked to do so.
- Keep accessibility in mind. Is that chair in the middle of your office a barrier to a wheelchair user? If so, move it aside.
- Don't be embarrassed to use such phrases as, "Let's walk over to the cafeteria."

Person Who has an Intellectual or Cognitive Disability

- Use simple, concrete language, but don't use baby talk.
- When giving instructions or directions, proceed slowly.
- Be patient, and repeat directions if necessary.
- Ask the person to summarize the information you have given to make sure it was understood.
- Give positive feedback whenever possible and appropriate.

Person Who is Blind

- Immediately identify yourself and others present; cue a handshake verbally or physically. Be descriptive in giving directions. (The table is about five steps to your left.)
- Don't be embarrassed to use such phrases as, "Do you see what I mean?"
- Don't shout.
- Keep doors either open or closed; a half-open door is a serious hazard.
- Ask the person if he or she needs a guide to the meeting room, chair, etc. Give a verbal cue that you're offering your arm. Let the person grasp your left arm, usually just above the elbow. Again, ask first, and do not be surprised if assistance is declined.
- Do not touch a person's cane. If the person has a guide dog, resist the urge to pet or interact with the animal. The guide dog is working while in harness and must remain focused on the needs of its owner.

Person Who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- If the person requests an interpreter, contact interpreters@nvcc.edu. Forward your request as soon as possible to schedule the service.
 - There are different types of interpreting services available so it's vital to ensure that when forwarding the interpreting request, you also provide the person's email address for follow up.
- Keep in mind that the interpreter's job is to translate, not to get involved in any other way.
- When working with interpreters, always face and speak directly to the person, not the interpreter. Don't say to the interpreter, "Tell her..."
- It is appropriate in Deaf culture to use a visual gesture such as a light wave to get the person's attention.
- If the person is speech/lip reading, speak clearly and a little slowly, keeping your mouth clear of obstructions. Place yourself where there is ample lighting. If possible, do not sit directly in front of a

window, or draw the blinds to avoid sunlight obstructing your face. Keep in mind that an accomplished speech/lip reader will be able to clearly understand only 30-35% of what you are saying.

- Don't shout.
- If you don't understand what the person is telling you, don't pretend you did. Ask them to repeat the sentence(s).

Communicating With and About People with Disabilities

Terminology changes over time and positive language is empowering. When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first. Group designations such as "the blind," "the retarded" or "the disabled" are inappropriate because they do not reflect the equality or dignity of people with disabilities. Further, words like "normal person" imply that the person with a disability isn't normal, whereas "a person without a disability" is descriptive but not negative. The accompanying chart shows examples of positive, people first language.

People-First Language	Labels Not to Use
People <i>with</i> disabilities	The handicapped or disabled.
People <i>with</i> intellectual disabilities	The mentally retarded
He <i>has</i> a learning disability.	He's learning disabled.
She <i>has</i> a physical disability.	She's crippled.
He <i>uses</i> a wheelchair.	He's wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair.
Person with a psychiatric disability	He's crazy, psycho, manic depressive.
Deaf or hard of hearing person	The hearing impaired.
<i>Accessible</i> parking, bathrooms, etc.	Handicapped parking, bathrooms, etc.

Information for this fact sheet is based on documents developed and distributed by the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor: www.dol.gov/odep, and through their project, the Employer Assistance and Resource Network (EARN): www.earnworks.com.

For additional information, contact the ADA Coordinator at 703-425-5695 or ada@nvcc.edu