

General Etiquette

1. When speaking with a person with a disability, talk directly to that person (in a normal tone and style), not through his or her companion. This applies whether the person has mobility impairment, a mental impairment, is blind or is deaf and uses an interpreter or reads lips.
2. Extend common courtesies to people with disabilities as you would anyone else. Shake hands or hand over business cards. If the person cannot shake your hand or grasp your card, they will tell you. Do not be ashamed of your attempt, however.
3. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others.
4. If you are having trouble understanding what the person with a disability is saying, ask the person to repeat; don't pretend you understand. The former is respectful and leads to accurate communication; the latter is belittling and leads to embarrassment.
5. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. If your offer is accepted, ask for instruction on how best to assist. This will help avoid frustration and embarrassment.
6. It is okay to feel nervous or uncomfortable around people with disabilities, and it's okay to admit that. When you encounter these situations, think "person" first instead of disability; you will eventually relax.
7. Do not be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions that seem to relate to a person's disability such as, "See you later," or "Did you hear about this?"
8. Whenever in doubt about how to interact with a person with a disability, ask him or her. They are the best judge of what will be useful.