

Best Practice Guidelines: Disability Etiquette

The following are practices to keep in mind when interacting with people with disabilities:

- Never assume you know what a person with a disability wants or needs.
- If offering any assistance, *always* wait for a response and then follow the individual's instructions.
- When talking to a person with a disability, talk directly to that individual, not the friend, companion or sign language interpreter who may be present.
- 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.
- Remember that people with disabilities are interested in the same topics of conversations as individuals without disabilities.
- 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 someone who is deaf or hard of hearing.
- *Do not* shout or raise your voice unless asked to do so.
- If greeting someone who is blind or has a visual impairment, identify yourself and those who may be accompanying you.
- Do not pet or make a service dog the focus of conversation.
- Let the individual know if you move or need to end the conversation.
- When interacting with a person who is visually impaired, follow their lead. If they need assistance, they will ask.
- Allow the person to negotiate their surroundings, e.g., finding the door handle, locating a chair, etc.
- Treat adults as adults. Address people with disabilities by their first name only when extending the same familiarity to all others.

Subject Matter Expertise Provided By: *Basic Disability Etiquette Tips*, PACER Center, Inc (2004) *Disability Etiquette*, Office of Diversity and Affirmative Action (2006), Illinois State University

Quality Monitoring Program <http://www.dads.state.tx.us/providers/qmp/evidence-based-best-practices/generalbp/disability-etiquette.html>

