



Ten Commandments of Etiquette For Communicating With Persons With Disabilities

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present.
2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer a shake of hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable gesture.)
3. When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen or ask for instructions.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have a disability by their first names only when that same familiarity to all others is present. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.)
6. Leaning or hanging on a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person and is generally considered annoying. A person's wheel chair is typically thought of as part of their body space.
7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.
8. When speaking with a person in a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate conversation.
9. To get the attention of a person who is hearing-impaired tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. Not all people with a hearing-impairment can lip-read. For those who do lip-read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking.
10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions, such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about this?" that seem to relate to the person's disability.