Appropriate Language

Appropriate interaction and communication with or about people with disabilities.

- **Speak directly to the person with a disability, not their companion or interpreter.**
- **Introduce yourself and ask, "How may I assist you?" Then wait for instructions on the help needed and follow the directions.**
- **Allow people to remain as independent as possible. If the person does not want or need help, take "no" for answer without feeling offended.**
- **Do not refer to a person's disability unless it is relevant.**
- **Most people with disabilities prefer "person-first" terminology such as "person who is blind" or "people with disabilities" since this acknowledges them as people first rather than their disability.**
- **Avoid referring to groups of people by their condition or disability such as "the blind" or "the deaf."**
- **Use "disabled," "disability" or "accessible" rather than "handicapped."**
- **Avoid condescending euphemisms such as "differently abled," "physically challenged," "mentally different" or "handicapable."**
- **Respect the privacy and individual preferences of people.**
- **Never say anything that you would not want said to or about yourself.**

Do say	Don't say
person with a disability, or has a disability, people with disabilities	the disabled, handicapped, physically challenged, differently abled
non-disabled, able-bodied	normal, healthy
uses wheelchair/ assistive device, e.g., wheelchair, crutches, walker	wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair people
congenital disability, birth injury	birth defect, birth affliction
person with a physical disability	crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, gimp
person who is deaf, hard of hearing	the deaf, hearing impaired, deaf mute
has a speech disability, unable to speak	has a speech defect, is dumb
person who is blind, has low vision	the blind, blind people, visually impaired
person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability	stupid, retard, slow, mentally deficient, mentally challenged
person with epilepsy, seizure disorder	epileptic, has fits, spastic
person with a psychiatric disability	crazy, nuts, loony
person of short stature, little person, dwarf	midget

Common Courtesies

- **Greet individuals with disabilities as you would any other customer**, whether it's with a smile, handshake or self-introduction.
- 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.**
- The **wheelchair is part of the individual's personal space:** don't lean or put anything on it. If conversing for more than a few minutes, **place yourself at their eye level** to spare both of you a stiff neck.
- When speaking with a person with vision loss, always remember to **identify yourself, introduce others** 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. **Describe barriers** you encounter as well as features along the route.
- **Use specific directions/distances**, such as left/3 steps away, when giving directions to someone with vision loss.
- Always face a person who is deaf or hard of hearing and, when in doubt, ask if it's OK to write notes. **Speaking loudly does not mean you will be heard**.
- When assisting someone with a cognitive disability, **treat adults as adults**. **Use simple words and phrases** and confirm that they understood.
- **Service animals are working** and should not be touched, petted or otherwise distracted.
- **If you are ever unsure about what to say or do, JUST ASK!**

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