

Disability Awareness and Etiquette



Figure 1: Photo Courtesy of Permobil.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 4 adults in the United States lives with a disability; some people may be born with visual or hearing impairments or have serious difficulties concentrating, while others experience medical

conditions or sustain injuries that cause paralysis. Disabilities, whether cognitive or physical, are a normal part of life for millions of people but they do not define an individual: a wheelchair is a means of transportation, not an indicator of ability or character. An awareness of disability etiquette can help guide social and work interactions with strangers, colleagues or friends who live with disabilities, and ensure that everyone is treated with equal dignity.

In general, remember that words and actions matter. Always treat adults like adults: do not condescend to a person with a disability or use their first name unless extending this familiarity to everyone present. Adopt common sense courtesies, such as always speaking directly to a person with a disability, rather than through a caregiver or aide, and never violate personal boundaries by touching or leaning on an individual's wheelchair. Don't pet or distract service animals, and when seeking to help a person with a disability, always ask permission first; if the offer is accepted, follow any specific instructions given. Taking time to consider the perspective of a person living with a disability will promote more respectful interactions and build a more inclusive society.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Easterseals

Websites

City of San Antonio: 2011 Disability Etiquette Handbook

<http://www.sanantonio.gov/Portals/0/Files/DAO/DisabilityEtiquetteHandbook.pdf>

This Disability Etiquette Handbook from the City of San Antonio, Texas, has information on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and guidelines for interacting with people with disabilities. The handbook covers topics such as reception and interviewing etiquette and preparing for sign language interpreters.

Community Resources for Independence: Etiquette

<https://www.crinet.org/resources-2/etiquette/>

This page has many tips for meeting, helping, and conversing with people with disabilities. There is an "Interacting with People with Disabilities" section with suggestions related to specific disabilities, and a "Using Words With Dignity" section with suggestions on respectful language to use when describing people with disabilities.

Disability is Natural

<http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/>

This site promotes new attitudes toward people with developmental disabilities through a range of articles, presentations and personal stories.

Easter Seals: Media Tips When Interviewing People with Disabilities

<https://www.easterseals.com/explore-resources/resources-library/tips-tools/media-tips-when-interviewing-people-disabilities>

This page has suggestions for interacting with people with disabilities, including conversations and common courtesies.

National Disability Navigator Resource Collaborative: Disability Etiquette—Tips for Interacting with People with Disabilities

<http://www.nationaldisabilitynavigator.org/ndnrc-materials/fact-sheets/fact-sheet-17/>

National Center for Disability and Journalism: Style Guide

<http://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

Program Development Associates (PDA)

<http://www.disabilitytraining.com/>

PDA sells videos on disability awareness. Put “disability awareness” in the search box.

Ragged Edge Online: Beyond the AP Stylebook – Language and Usage Guide for Reporters and Editors. Advocado Press, 1992.

<http://www.raggededgemagazine.com/mediacircus/styleguide.htm>

Guidelines to use to avoid demeaning and sensationalized words and phrases when writing about people with disabilities.

United Spinal Organization: Disability Etiquette – Tips on Interacting With People with Disabilities

<http://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>

This booklet can be viewed or downloaded as a PDF file or you can order the print edition for free <https://www.unitedspinalstore.org/>.

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