



# The Ability Center

## Points to Remember when you meet an individual who has a disability ...

- Remember that a person living with a disability is a person, just like anyone else.
- Relax. It's no big deal. In fact, it is natural to be apprehensive in unfamiliar situations. If you don't know what to do or say, allow the individual with the disability to help put you at ease.
- Explore your mutual interests in a friendly way. The person probably has many interests besides those connected with their disability.
- Offer assistance if asked, or if the need for assistance appears to be obvious; don't overdo or insist upon assisting the individual. Rather than be forceful, respect the individual's right to indicate what type of assistance they need.
- Don't start with, "Hey, what happened to you?" Talk about the disability if it comes up naturally in the course of a "normal" conversation.
- Appreciate what the person can do. Remember, the difficulties that the person may be facing may stem more from society's attitudes and barriers than from the disability itself.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to get things done. Let the person set the pace in walking and talking.
- Remember that we all have handicaps; on some of us they show.
- Speak directly to the individual who has a disability. Don't consider a companion to be a conversational go-between or interpreter.
- Don't move a wheelchair or crutches away or out of the reach of the person who uses them.
- Never start to push a wheelchair without first asking the chair-user if you may do so.
- When assisting a wheelchair-user up or down steps, ramps, curbs, or other obstructions, ask the individual how they want you to proceed.
- Don't lean on an individual's wheelchair. It is considered an extension of that individual.

- Give whole, unhurried attention to the person who has difficulty speaking. Don't talk for them but help when needed. Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting. When necessary, ask questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head.
- Speak calmly, slowly and distinctly to the individual with the hearing impairment or other difficulty understanding. Stand in front of the individual and use gestures to aid communication. When full understanding is in doubt, write notes or use other modes of communication.
- When dining with an individual who has difficulties with cutting their food, offer to help if needed. It may be easier to ask if the person would prefer their food cut in the kitchen prior to having the food delivered to their table. Explain to an individual who has a vision impairment where dishes, utensils and condiments are located on the table.
- Be alert to possible existence of architectural barriers in places that you may want to enter with a person who has disability. Watch for inadequate lighting, which inhibits communication by persons who have a hearing impairment.

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