


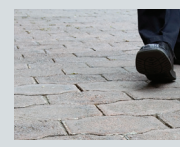




WORKPLACE

# Disabilities etiquette 101

Do you know the greatest obstacle people with disabilities face in the workplace is the response of others to their disability? Don't let uncertainty hold you back from interacting with people with disabilities.

DISABILITY	WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW	INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES	TALKING TO OR WRITING ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
 <p><b>People who use wheelchairs or have mobility impairments</b></p>	<p>People with mobility impairments have varying abilities. Some can get out of their wheelchair, walk for short distances, and use their arms and hands. Others "look fine" but experience ambulatory difficulties when their symptoms flare or they grow fatigued.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Don't push, touch, or lean on the person's wheelchair.</li> <li>Consider physical obstacles (curbs, stairs, hills) when giving directions.</li> <li>Keep halls, corridors, and aisles clear.</li> <li>Ask before you help.</li> <li>Don't make assumptions.</li> <li>Keep floors dry and slip free. Use rubber mats to prevent falls.</li> <li>Position yourself at eye level when talking with a person in a wheelchair.</li> <li>Don't grab someone's arm—even to help. Some people with mobility impairments use their arms for balance.</li> <li>Position computers, telephones, and equipment within a wheelchair user's reach.</li> <li>Provide assistive or adaptive devices, such as mouth sticks, head wands, oversized trackball mouse, adaptive keyboards, voice-recognition software, or eye-tracking devices.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outdated language:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Handicapped</li> <li>Crippled</li> <li>Lame</li> <li>Confined to a wheelchair</li> <li>Wheelchair bound</li> <li>The disabled</li> </ul> <p><b>Current language:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wheelchair user</li> <li>Person who uses a wheelchair</li> <li>Person who walks with crutches</li> <li>Person with limited mobility</li> <li>Person with disabilities</li> </ul> 
 <p><b>People who are blind, visually impaired, or partially sighted</b></p>	<p>People with visual impairments are generally able to live independently, travel, maintain a career, read and write, have an active social life, and more. Not all people who are visually impaired use canes or guide dogs. Some use auditory or tactile cues or echolocation to navigate their environment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify yourself and others with you.</li> <li>Never touch a person's cane or guide dog.</li> <li>When walking alongside someone with a visual impairment, note obstacles, such as stairs, revolving doors, hanging plants, and so forth.</li> <li>Describe the location of objects. (There is a desk four feet in front of you at two o'clock.)</li> <li>Excuse yourself before leaving a person who is blind. Leave him near a desk, chair, or other landmark.</li> <li>Offer to read written information, such as menus, instructions, or agreements.</li> <li>Provide magnification devices or writing guides for computer screens.</li> <li>Use accessibility guidelines when designing your website.</li> <li>Consider speech-recognition software, smartphones, and low-vision, adaptive devices for people with visual impairments.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outdated language:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The blind</li> <li>Afflicted</li> </ul> <p><b>Current language:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person who is blind</li> <li>Person who is visually impaired</li> <li>Person with low vision</li> </ul> <p><b>In general:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand that "visually impaired" is the generic term to refer to all types of vision loss. Avoid other generic labels.</li> <li>Contact the National Federation of the Blind (<a href="http://www.nfb.org">www.nfb.org</a>) for more information.</li> </ul> 
 <p><b>People who are deaf or hard of hearing</b></p>	<p>People who are deaf or hard of hearing have a range of communication preferences and styles. Not everyone who is deaf or hard of hearing uses American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is a visual language that is completely different from English. If ASL is a deaf person's first language, lip reading can be difficult. However, people who are hard of hearing or late-deafened adults communicate in English and often use amplification or assistive devices, along with lip reading, to communicate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If appropriate, use a qualified sign-language interpreter for complex exchanges of information, such as a job interview.</li> <li>Speak directly to the person who is deaf, not the interpreter.</li> <li>Look directly at the person when speaking. Use simple, easy-to-understand sentences.</li> <li>Avoid smoking, chewing gum, or obscuring your mouth.</li> <li>Speak clearly. Some people who are hard of hearing watch people's lips as they speak.</li> <li>Use meaningful facial expressions and gestures.</li> <li>Gain the person's attention before speaking. Gently wave your hand or tap the person on the shoulder or arm.</li> <li>Rephrase, rather than repeat, words, phrases, or sentences the person doesn't understand.</li> <li>People who are deaf or hard of hearing make and receive telephone calls with a TTY (a teletypewriter). If you don't have a TTY, dial 711 to reach the national telecommunications relay service. They can facilitate a telephone call between you and an individual who uses a TTY.</li> <li>When working in a group, ask people who are deaf or hard of hearing how they prefer to communicate (sign-language interpreter, read lips, write back and forth, and so forth).</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outdated language:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deaf mute</li> <li>Deaf and dumb</li> </ul> <p><b>Current language:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Person who is deaf/profoundly deaf (no hearing capability)</li> <li>Person who is hearing impaired (some hearing capability)</li> <li>Person who is prelingually (deaf at birth) deaf</li> <li>Person who is post-lingually (deaf-after-birth) deaf</li> </ul> <p><b>In general:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand that "hearing impaired" and "hearing loss" are generic terms sometimes used to refer to all degrees of hearing loss. However, some people object to the terms and prefer terms such as "deaf" or "hard of hearing."</li> <li>Contact the National Association of the Deaf (<a href="http://www.nad.org">www.nad.org</a>) for more information.</li> </ul> 



DISABILITY

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

TALKING TO OR WRITING ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

**People with speech disabilities**



A person who is hearing impaired, who has had a stroke, or has cerebral palsy may have a speech impairment or disability. Some choose to communicate in sign language or writing, while others use their voice or use assistive technology.

- Don't assume a person with a speech disability has a cognitive impairment.
- Try to find a quiet environment in which to communicate.
- Give the person your complete attention. Never interrupt or pretend to understand when you do not.
- Be patient. Never finish a person's sentences for him.
- When possible, ask questions that require short answers.
- Repeat for verification if you are not sure you understand.
- If repeated attempts to understand the person fail, find another method to communicate. For example, ask him to write down what he is saying.
- If you have difficulty understanding someone on the telephone, use a speech-to-speech relay service.
- If a person uses a communication device, make sure it is within easy reach.
- If a person uses an interpreter or attendant, look directly at the person who is speaking, not the attendant.

**Outdated language:**

- Deaf and dumb
- Dumb
- A mute

**Current language:**

- Person with a speech impediment
- Person with a speech disability
- Person who is unable to speak
- Person who uses synthetic speech

**In general:**

- Avoid negative attitudes and connotations.
- Never tease or laugh at a person with a speech impairment.



**People with invisible (hidden) disabilities**



According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24 million people in the United States have a severe disability, yet separate research from the University of California reports that only 6.8 million people used a visible assistive device. Thus, a disability cannot be determined solely on whether a person uses visible assistive equipment.

- Realize physical appearances can be deceiving. It is possible to "look good" but still have a serious illness.
- Understand pain and fatigue, common symptoms with invisible disabilities, may limit a person's ability to walk, sit, or stand for long periods.
- Recognize people with hidden disabilities may manage their condition through medication and self-management (limiting stress, alternating demanding activities with periods of rest, self-pacing). Good self-management may prevent disease progression.
- Understand that simple tasks, such as shaking hands, pouring coffee, and walking up and down steps, may be painful for a person with an invisible disability. Be sensitive and respond positively to requests for help.
- Work with the individual to modify tasks. She is an "expert" in what works and what doesn't.
- Recognize physical symptoms and limitations may change based on fluctuations in the disease process.
- Understand changes in medication often result in changes in health.
- Understand someone with a hidden disability may be physically unable to participate in social activities and events, such as dancing, golfing, or other activities.
- Know that people with invisible disabilities often require more rest, which makes late nights difficult.
- Know that people with invisible disabilities may require special accommodations under the Americans With Disabilities Act, such as limited travel, flexible work hours, workstation modification or placement, or telecommuting. Contrary to popular opinion, most accommodations are not expensive.

**Outdated language:**

- The disabled
- Deformed
- Victim
- "Suffers with..."
- "Overcame" his disability
- Admits she has a disability

**Current language:**

- Person who has multiple sclerosis (or muscular dystrophy, rheumatoid arthritis, cerebral palsy, and so forth)
- Person with a disability
- Person with invisible chronic illness
- Successful, productive
- Says she has a disability

**In general:**

- Avoid condescending euphemisms, such as "physically inconvenienced" or "physically challenged." Instead, say "woman with rheumatoid arthritis" or "man with multiple sclerosis."
- Avoid saying, "But you look so good." Although meant as a compliment, it implies, "If you had a real disability, it would show."



**IN GENERAL:**

- Avoid negative, disempowering words like "victim." Instead, use empowering, "people first" language.
- Don't use trendy terms, such as "differently abled."
- Omit stereotypes. People with disabilities are not "brave," "courageous," or "heroic" for working, using public transportation, or traveling to an event.
- Avoid pity.
- Contact The National Organization on Disability ([www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)) for more information.

Contributed by Mary J. Yerkes, communications manager and staff writer for NACHA—The Electronic Payments Association. Email: [myerkes@nacha.org](mailto:myerkes@nacha.org)