



Ohio | Opportunities for Ohioans
with Disabilities

Disability Etiquette

What is a Disability?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines an individual with a disability as: a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; a person who has a history or record of such impairment; or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.

Major life activities may include:



Seeing



Hearing



Walking



Caring for
oneself



Learning



Thinking



Communicating

Four Simple Rules for Disability Etiquette

1

Show Respect

Treat people with disabilities as you would anyone else.

2

Be Courteous

Respect people's personal space and assistive devices.

3

Don't Assume

Every person, and every disability, is different.

4

Ask First

If a person appears to need assistance, ask before helping.

Using Appropriate Language

People First Language

Places the person first;
disability doesn't define the person
"The person who is blind."

Identity First Language

Focuses on the disability as a source
of positive identity and pride.
"The deaf person."

Guidelines for Choosing Appropriate Language

- If a person's disability isn't relevant to the conversation, **don't mention the disability** at all. Simply refer to the person as you would anyone else.
- If possible, **ask the person** what language to use, and use that.
- If you can't ask the person directly, **check with an organization** that represents people with that disability to see if there is cultural **preference**.
- When in doubt, use **people first language**.

Language Do's and Don'ts



Person with a
disability



Handicapped



Accessible Parking



Handicapped Parking



Person without a
disability



Able-bodied, normal,
healthy

Avoid these negative words and phrases

retarded
crippled
lame

afflicted
wheelchair-bound
confined to a wheelchair

deformed
dumb
victim



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Tips for Respectful Interactions

Physical Disabilities

Take a seat. When having a longer conversation with a person who uses a wheelchair, sit down so you'll be at the same eye level.

No leaning. Never lean or place items on a person's wheelchair or mobility device. Think of this as an extension of their body. Also, avoid leaning over a person's wheelchair or mobility device when having a conversation, or when shaking hands with others.

Ask first. Never grab someone who uses a cane or crutches or move those devices without asking. Ask before pushing someone's wheelchair.

Relax and be natural. It's okay to use phrases such as, "let's walk over to the white board" or "she's running late". Shake a prosthetic hand as you would do with anyone else. Shake hands with your left hand with someone who does not have a right hand. Continue eye contact with someone who has a cosmetic disfigurement.

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Be direct. It is helpful to be direct with your questions and to communicate clearly and concisely.

Practice patience. Be patient and give the person time to respond. Remain comfortable with breaks in conversation. It may take the person with an intellectual or developmental disability a little bit longer to process what you have said, and to formulate a response.

Try a different way. If you are asked to repeat a question, try to explain it in a different way. It may be helpful to write information down or use images.

Don't take it personally. Don't take it personally if a person with autism responds to you bluntly or makes a frank comment. Respond in a straightforward manner that explains why the response was inappropriate and give them a specific example of a more appropriate response.

Tips for Respectful Interactions

Blind or Low Vision

Identify yourself. When you enter the room, immediately identify yourself, and let the person know when you're stepping away. For virtual meetings, announce yourself each time before you speak.

No petting. Never pet a guide dog or service animal, offer a treat, or call its name without asking. You risk confusing the animal, which puts the person with a disability at risk.

Ask first. Ask before you shake someone's hand, so you don't take them by surprise. Ask before helping and never pull a person by their arm or cane. If you are asked to help, offer your arm so the person can grasp your elbow and be sure to alert the person to any obstacles, such as stairs or an extension cord on the floor. Let the person know when they have reached a chair or doorway.

Relax and be natural. Don't be embarrassed to use phrases such as, "See what I mean?" or "Did you watch the game last night?"

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Getting attention. To get the attention of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, it's best to use a visual signal such as waving your hands or switching the lights off and then on again. You can also gently tap on the person's desk. Avoid shouting. Always face the person when talking.

Interpreter etiquette. If someone is using a sign language interpreter, make sure not to block the line of sight to the interpreter. At a meeting, consult the deaf person as to the best placement of the interpreter to ensure they can visually see the information presented. Always talk directly to the deaf or hard of hearing person instead of their interpreter.

Try a different way. If you are having trouble communicating, use a written note or mobile device to ask the person how best to communicate with them. Don't pretend you understand what someone is signing or saying. Ask them to repeat or write something down.

Tips for Respectful Interactions

Mental Health Disabilities

Don't assume. Don't patronize, condescend, or make decisions for the person. Don't make assumptions about what a person wants, likes, or needs.

Never disclose. If you are aware of a person's mental health disability, you should never disclose this to others without asking.

No blame. Don't blame the person. A person with a mental health disability can't just "snap out of it." It is insensitive and ineffective to tell the person to do so.

Follow the golden rule. Treat people with mental health disabilities as you would want to be treated yourself. Focus on the person, not the disability. Remember there are many different types of mental health diagnoses and each person is affected differently.

OOD Resources

OOD's Business Relations Specialists offer Disability Etiquette Training in-person or virtually for Employer Partners to support their efforts to create a culture of diversity and inclusion. Other training sessions available include:

Windmills Disability Awareness Training

These interactive modules are designed for employers to examine personal attitudes and biases toward people with disabilities.

Getting On Board with Inclusive Hiring

An interactive session on identifying and removing barriers in the hiring and on-boarding process to make it more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities

Invisible Disabilities

This engaging education session on "invisible disabilities" (e.g., traumatic brain injury, mental health, intellectual) and the fears, myths, and barriers that are often associated with them

Game Changers

Assistive Technology in the workplace can be a game changer for employees with disabilities. Learn how easy it can be to incorporate technology solutions to enable all employees to succeed!

[OOD's Disability Education Resources webpage](#)

["Let OOD Customize a No-Cost Training Program for Your Business" fact sheet](#)

[Contact a facilitator/Business Relations Specialist in your area to schedule training!](#)



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