

Disability Etiquette

from the World Institute on Disability



Don't panic. Disabilities make many people very uncomfortable – this is normal, because due to inaccessibility, many people don't see visibly disabled people in their daily lives – but it's important to remember that it is not anyone's job to make you feel comfortable with their body! While it may make you feel nervous or excited to see a person with a disability performing an everyday action like crossing the street or dicing an onion, imagine how it would feel if you had people constantly approaching you and exclaiming how dangerous it is for you to do normal things – it's weird, and not very helpful! Take a deep breath, and take responsibility for your own emotional response.



Offer help thoughtfully. People with disabilities will usually ask for help if they need it, so there's no need to offer help if somebody seems fine in their activities. If somebody appears to be struggling – for example, having a hard time opening a door or seeming lost – it can be okay to offer help. If they decline, respect their decision.



Include us in everything. People with disabilities should be included in all activities to every extent possible, so invite them to participate in business and social events. If an event is not accessible, work with attendees to modify it and/or provide accommodations – collaborate and be creative!



Speak respectfully. Always speak directly to the individual with a disability, rather than to their interpreter, friend, or other companion. Also, speak at a normal speed and volume, unless asked otherwise. Avoid patronizing people with disabilities, treating them as if they have less intelligence or capability, or otherwise treating them disrespectfully. Don't make comments about how you could never live like they do, how you are inspired by them, or give unsolicited advice about their condition.



Identify yourself. People with disabilities should be included in all activities to every extent possible, so invite them to participate in business and social events. If an event is not accessible, work with attendees to modify it and/or provide accommodations – collaborate and be creative!



Respect personal space and property – don't touch without permission. Respect personal space – so do not grab or touch a person with a disability, lean in close to them, or otherwise impede their comfort. Trained service animals, canes, wheelchairs, communication boards, or any other assistive device should be considered as an extension of the person's body, and should never be touched without permission.



Ask before discussing disability. Some people with disabilities are comfortable talking about disability topics or their personal situation, but some prefer not to. If you have questions about disabilities and experiences, ask if it's okay to discuss, and be okay with receiving a "no". Be appropriate and respectful of personal subjects, such as healthcare, traumatic events, and relationships.



If you are not sure, ask questions. If you are unsure about what an appropriate action should be, ask individuals what they prefer. A person with a disability would much rather be asked about what the best actions are rather than be caught in an uncomfortable situation.