



# DISABILITY ETIQUETTE HANDBOOK

Revised and Updated 8/2000

The City of San Antonio, Texas and the Disability Advisory Committee have prepared this **Disability Etiquette Handbook** to enhance opportunities for persons with disabilities to pursue their careers and independent lifestyles.

The **Disability Etiquette Handbook** is yet another step toward making San Antonio one of the most accessible cities in the nation. It contains information that can help make San Antonio a better place for all who visit, live and work here.

The **Disability Etiquette Handbook** will be featured in the third edition of the Encyclopedia of Special Education edited by C.R. Reynolds and E. Fletcher-Janzen and published by John Wiley & Sons.

## People With Disabilities

People with disabilities are not conditions or diseases. They are individual human beings. For example, a person is **not** an *epileptic* but rather a *person who has epilepsy*.

First and foremost they are people. Only secondarily do they have one or more disabling conditions. Hence, they prefer to be referred to in print or broadcast media as **People with Disabilities**.

In any story, article, announcement or advertisement, "people with disabilities" should be used either exclusively or, at a minimum, as the initial reference. Subsequent references can use the terms "person with a disability" or "individuals with disabilities" for grammatical or narrative reasons. In conclusion, the appropriate and preferred initial reference is "people with disabilities." Please refer to the Glossary of Acceptable Terms for a complete listing of acceptable terms and appropriate applications.

## Distinction between Disability and Handicap

A **Disability** is a condition caused by an accident, trauma, genetics or disease which may limit a person's mobility, hearing, vision, speech or mental function. Some people with disabilities have one or more disabilities.

A **Handicap** is a physical or attitudinal constraint that is imposed upon a person, regardless of whether that person has a disability. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines handicap as to put at a disadvantage.

### Example:

Some people with disabilities use wheelchairs. Stairs, narrow doorways and curbs are handicaps imposed upon people with disabilities who use wheelchairs.

People with disabilities have all manner of disabling conditions:

- mobility impairments
- blindness and vision impairments
- deafness and hearing impairments
- speech and language impairments
- mental and learning disabilities.

## Reception Etiquette

Know where accessible restrooms, drinking fountains and telephones are located. If such facilities are not available, be ready to offer alternatives, such as the private or employee restroom, a glass of water or your desk phone.

Use a normal tone of voice when extending a verbal welcome. Do not raise your voice unless requested.

When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands.

Shaking hands with the left hand is acceptable.

For those who cannot shake hands, touch the person on the shoulder or arm to welcome and acknowledge their presence.

Treat adults in a manner befitting adults:

Call a person by his or her first name only when extending that familiarity to all others present.

Never patronize people using wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.

When addressing a person who uses a wheelchair, never lean on the person's wheelchair. The chair is part of the space that belongs to the person who uses it.

When talking with a person with a disability, look at and speak directly to that person rather than through a companion who may be along.

If an interpreter is present, speak to the person who has scheduled the appointment, not to the interpreter. Always maintain eye contact with the applicant, not the interpreter. Offer assistance in a dignified manner with sensitivity and respect. Be prepared to have the offer declined. Do not proceed to assist if your offer to assist is declined. If the offer is accepted, listen to or accept instructions.

Allow a person with a visual impairment to take your arm (at or about the elbow.) This will enable you to guide rather than propel or lead the person.

Offer to hold or carry packages in a welcoming manner.

**Example:** *May I help you with your packages?*

When offering to hand a coat or umbrella, do not offer to hand a cane or crutches unless the individual requests otherwise.

# Service Animals

## Background

Over 12,000 people with disabilities use the aid of service animals. Although the most familiar types of service animals are guide dogs used by people who are blind, service animals are assisting persons who have other disabilities as well. Many disabling conditions are invisible. Therefore, every person who is accompanied by a service animal may or may not "look" disabled. A service animal is NOT required to have any special certification.

## What is a Service Animal?

A service animal is **NOT** a pet!

## According to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

A service animal is any animal that has been individually trained to provide assistance or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a physical or mental disability which substantially limits one or more major life functions.

## Service Animal Access

The civil rights of persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animals in all places of public and housing accommodations is protected by the following Federal laws:

- Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA (1990)
- Air Carrier Access Act (1986)
- Fair Housing Amendments Act (1988)
- Rehabilitation Act (1973)

## Service Dog Etiquette

- Do not touch the Service Animal, or the person it assists, without permission.
- Do not make noises at the Service Animal, it may distract the animal from doing its job.
- Do not feed the Service Animal, it may disrupt his/her schedule.
- Do not be offended if the person does not feel like discussing his/her disability or the assistance the Service Animal provides. Not everyone wants to be a walking-talking "show and tell" exhibit.

## PREPARING FOR SIGN LANGUAGE INTERPRETERS

The professional interpreter is always considered as an extension of and part of the event. Interpreters are part of the team meant to deliver accurate and intended messages given by the presenters or performers.

The further in advance notice is provided to the interpreter, the more prepared they will be. This process will allow the interpreter to have the proper time needed for an event and prevent "cold" interpreting. Time for preparation is essential to allow accurate dissemination of the intended messages to the audience.

For instance, an interpreter needs to spend an average of 15-20 hours of practice for a 2 hour musical concert. With this in mind, the following information given to the interpreter will enhance the quality of the interpreted performance/event. Name and type of event.

Name of event contact person with a phone number.

- Correct billing address.
- Clear address and directions to the event and the location where the interpreter is to check-in.
- Parking passes or information on any kind of special arrangements for parking.
- Correct spellings of all names of those speaking or performing.
- A summary of subjects that will be presented by each speaker.
- A list of any musical lyrics in advance, ideally at the time of request.
- Communication and shared information to all persons directly involved with the event regarding the arrangements for the interpreter.

If any information to be presented is other than English, a written interpretation in English will be needed in advance. "OR" an advance notice of at least 3 weeks will be needed to allow adequate time to secure an appropriate interpreter.

### **Staging:**

Ideally, the interpreter should be on stage, to the side of the presenter to enhance visibility for the deaf audience. If the interpreter can not be on stage, they should be placed off the side of the stage on an elevated surface at chest level above the heads of the audience with a speaker placed in front of and facing the interpreter. "OR" the host may choose to provide at least 2 direct in-line headsets to microphone.

### **Lighting:**

Any time you have lights on the presenter's you will also need to plan on lights for the interpreters especially if the event is inside of an auditorium or in any area of darkness. A soft light staged to encompass the interpreter is essential for the deaf viewer. Effective colors seem to be soft blue, light purple or any other soft color except BOLD white.

### **Security:**

When security is present for the event, it is advisable to remember to include securing the safety of the interpreter or to have security placed close by the interpreter performing.

Thanks to Deb Andersen, Interpreter for her valuable advice.

## **Conversation Etiquette**

When talking to a person with a disability, look at and speak directly to that person, rather than through a companion who may be along.

Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted common expressions such as **See you later** or **Got to be running along** that seem to relate to the person's disability.

To get the attention of a person with a hearing impairment, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, naturally and slowly to establish if the person can read lips. Not all persons with hearing impairments can lip-read. Those who can will rely on facial expression and other body language to help in understanding. Show consideration by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping your hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking. Keep mustaches well-trimmed. Shouting won't help. Written notes may.

When talking with a person in a wheel chair for more than a few minutes, use a chair, whenever possible, in order to place yourself at the person's eye level to facilitate conversation.

When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others who may be with you.

**EXAMPLE:** *On my right is Penelope Potts.*

When conversing in a group, give a vocal cue by announcing the name of the person to whom you are speaking. Speak in a normal tone of voice, indicate in advance when you will be moving from one place to another and let it be known when the conversation is at an end.

Listen attentively when you're talking to a person who has a speech impairment. Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting. Exercise patience rather than attempting to speak for a person with speech difficulty. When necessary, ask short questions that require short answers or a nod or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Repeat what you understand, or incorporate the interviewee's statements into each of the following questions. The person's reactions will clue you in and guide you to understanding.

If you have difficulty communicating, be willing to repeat or rephrase a question. Open-ended questions are more appropriate than closed-ended questions.

**EXAMPLE:**

**Closed-Ended Question:** *You were a tax accountant in XYZ Company in the corporate ada department for seven years. What did you do there?*

**Open-Ended Question:** *Tell me about your recent position as a tax accountant.*

Do not shout at a hearing impaired person. Shouting distorts sounds accepted through hearing aids and inhibits lip reading. Do not shout at a person who is blind or visually impaired -- he or she can hear you!

To facilitate conversation, be prepared to offer a visual cue to a hearing impaired person or an audible cue to a vision impaired person, especially when more than one person is speaking.

## Interviewing Scheduling Etiquette

Some interviewees with visual or mobility impairments will phone in prior to the appointment date, specifically for travel information. The scheduler should be very familiar with the travel path in order to provide interviewees with detailed information.

Make sure the place where you plan to conduct the interview is accessible by checking the following:

Are there handicap parking spaces available and nearby?

Is there a ramp or step-free entrance?

Are there accessible restrooms?

If the interview is not on the first floor, does the building have an elevator?

Are there any water fountains and telephones at the proper height for a person in a wheelchair to use?

If an interview site is inaccessible (e.g., steps without a ramp or a building without an elevator), inform the person about the barrier prior to the interview and offer to make arrangements for an alternative interview site.

When scheduling interviews for persons with disabilities, consider their needs ahead of time:

When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs and steep hills.

Use specifics such as **left a hundred feet** or **right two yards** when directing a person with a visual impairment.

Be considerate of the additional travel time that may be required by a person with a disability.

Familiarize the interviewee in advance with the names of all persons he or she will be meeting during the visit. This courtesy allows persons with disabilities to be aware of the names and faces that will be met.

People with disabilities use a variety of transportation services when traveling to and from work. When scheduling an interview, be aware that the person may be required to make a reservation 24 hours in advance, plus travel time. Provide the interviewee with an estimated time to schedule the return trip when arranging the interview appointment.

Expect the same measure of punctuality and performance from people with disabilities that is required of every potential or actual employee.

People with disabilities expect **equal** treatment, not special treatment.

### **Interviewing Technique Etiquette**

1. Conduct interviews in a manner that emphasizes abilities, achievements and individual qualities.
2. Conduct your interview as you would with anyone. Be considerate without being patronizing.
3. When interviewing a person with a speech impediment, stifle any urge to complete a sentence of an interviewee.
4. If it appears that a person's ability inhibits performance of a job, ask: **How would you perform this job?**

#### **Examples:**

**Inappropriate:** *I notice that you are in a wheelchair, and I wonder how you get around. Tell me about your disability.*

**Appropriate:** *This position requires digging and using a wheelbarrow, as you can see from the job description. Do you foresee any difficulty in performing the required tasks? If so, do you have any suggestions how these tasks can be performed?*

# Interviewing Courtesies for Effective Communication

Interviewers need to know whether or not the job site is accessible and should be prepared to answer accessibility-related questions.

Interviewing a person using [Mobility Aids](#)  
Interviewing a person with [Vision Impairments](#)  
Interviewing a person with [Speech Impairments](#)  
Interviewing a person who is [Deaf or Hearing Impaired](#)

## Interviewing a person using **Mobility Aids**

Enable people who use crutches, canes or wheelchairs to keep them within reach.

Be aware that some wheelchair users may choose to transfer themselves out of their wheelchairs (into an office chair, for example) for the duration of the interview.

Here again, when speaking to a person in a wheelchair or on crutches for more than a few minutes, sit in a chair. Place yourself at that person's eye level to facilitate conversation.

## Interviewing a person with **Vision Impairments**

When greeting a person with a vision impairment always identify yourself and introduce anyone else who might be present.

If the person does not extend their hand to shake hands, verbally extend a welcome.

**EXAMPLE:** *Welcome to the City of San Antonio ada Department, Disability Access Office.*

When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat. A verbal cue is helpful as well.

Let the person know if you move or need to end the conversation.

Allow people who use crutches, canes or wheelchairs to keep them within reach.

## Interviewing a person with **Speech Impairments**

Give your whole attention with interest when talking to a person who has a speech impairment.

Ask short questions that require short answers or a nod of the head.

Do not pretend to understand if you do not. Try rephrasing what you wish to communicate, or ask the person to repeat what you do not understand.

Do not raise your voice. Most speech impaired persons can hear and understand.

## Interview a person who is **Deaf or Hearing Impaired**

If you need to attract the attention of a person who is deaf or hearing impaired, touch him or her lightly on the shoulder.

If the interviewee lip-reads, look directly at him or her. Speak clearly at a normal pace. Do not exaggerate your lip movements or shout. Speak expressively because the person will rely on your facial expressions, gestures and eye contact. (Note: It is estimated that only four out of ten spoken words are visible on the lips.)

Place yourself placing the light source and keep your hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking.

Shouting does not help and can be detrimental. Only raise your voice when requested. Brief, concise written notes may be helpful.

In the United States most deaf people use American Sign Language (ASL.) ASL is not a universal language. ASL is a language with its own syntax and grammatical structure. When scheduling an interpreter for a non-English speaking person, be certain to retain an interpreter that speaks and interprets in the language of the person.

If an interpreter is present, it is commonplace for the interpreter to be seated beside the interviewer, across from the interviewee.

Interpreters facilitate communication. They should not be consulted or regarded as a reference for the interview.

## Do & Don'ts

**Do** learn where to find and recruit people with disabilities.

**Don't** assume that persons with disabilities do not want to work.

**Don't** assume that alcoholism and drug abuse are not real disabilities, or that recovering drug abusers are not covered by the ADA.

**Do** learn how to communicate with people who have disabilities.

**Don't** ask if a person has a disability during an employment interview.

**Don't** assume that certain jobs are more suited to persons with disabilities.

**Do** ensure that your applications and other company forms do not ask disability-related questions and that they are in formats that are accessible to all persons with disabilities.

**Don't** hire a person with a disability if that person is at significant risk of substantial harm to the health and safety of the public and there is no reasonable accommodation to reduce the risk or harm.

**Don't** hire a person with a disability who is not qualified to perform the essential functions of the job even with a reasonable accommodation.

**Don't** assume that you have to retain an unqualified employee with a disability.

**Do** consider having written job descriptions that identify the essential functions of each job.

**Don't** assume that your current management will need special training to learn how to work with people with disabilities.

**Do** ensure that requirements for medical examinations comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA.)

**Don't** assume that the cost of accident insurance will increase as a result of hiring a person with a disability.

**Do** relax and make the applicant feel comfortable.

**Don't** assume that the work environment will be unsafe if an employee has a disability.

**Do** provide reasonable accommodations that the qualified applicant will need to compete for the job.

**Don't** assume that reasonable accommodations are expensive.

**Do** treat an individual with a disability the same way you would treat any applicant or employee -- with dignity and respect.

**Don't** speculate or try to imagine how you would perform a specific job if you had the applicant's disability.

**Do** know that among those protected by the ADA are qualified individuals who have AIDS, cancer, who are mentally retarded, traumatically brain-injured, deaf, blind and learning disabled.

**Don't** assume that you don't have any jobs that a person with a disability can do.

**Do** understand that access includes not only environmental access but also making forms accessible to people with visual or cognitive disabilities and making alarms and signals accessible to people with hearing disabilities.

**Don't** assume that your work place is accessible.

**Do** develop procedures for maintaining and protecting confidential medical records.

**Don't** make medical judgments.

**Do** train supervisors on making reasonable accommodations.

**Don't** assume that a person with a disability can't do a job due to apparent or non-apparent disabilities

## Glossary of Acceptable Terms

### Acceptable Terms

Person with a disability.

Disability, a general term used for functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability, for example, to walk, hear or lift. It may refer to a physical, mental or sensory condition.

People with cerebral palsy, people with spinal cord injuries.

Person who had a spinal cord injury, polio, a stroke, etc. or a person who has multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, arthritis, etc.

Has a disability, has a condition of (spina bifida, etc.), or born without legs, etc.

Deafness/hearing impairment. **Deafness** refers to a person who has a total loss of hearing. **Hearing impairment** refers to a person who has a partial loss of hearing within a range from slight to severe.

**Hard of hearing** describes a hearing-impaired person who communicates through speaking and speech-reading, and who usually has listening and hearing abilities adequate for ordinary telephone communication. Many hard of hearing individuals use a hearing aid.

Person who has a mental or developmental disability.

Use a wheelchair or crutches; a wheelchair user; walks with crutches.

Able-bodied; able to walk, see, hear, etc.; people who are not disabled.

### Unacceptable Terms

Cripple, cripples - the image conveyed is of a twisted, deformed, useless body.

Handicap, handicapped person or handicapped.

Cerebral palsied, spinal cord injured, etc. Never identify people solely by their disability.

Victim. People with disabilities do not like to be perceived as victims for the rest of their lives, long after any victimization has occurred.

Defective, defect, deformed, vegetable. These words are offensive, dehumanizing, degrading and stigmatizing.

Deaf and Dumb is as bad as it sounds. The inability to hear or speak does not indicate intelligence.

Retarded, moron, imbecile, idiot. These are offensive to people who bear the label.

Confined/restricted to a wheelchair; wheelchair bound. Most people who use a wheelchair or mobility devices do not regard them as confining. They are viewed as liberating; a means of getting around.

Healthy, when used to contrast with "disabled." Healthy implies that the person with a disability is unhealthy. Many people with disabilities have excellent health.

People who do not have a disability.

Normal. When used as the opposite of disabled, this implies that the person is abnormal. No one wants to be labeled as abnormal.

A person who has (name of disability.)  
**Example:** A person who has multiple sclerosis.

Afflicted with, suffers from. Most people with disabilities do not regard themselves as afflicted or suffering continually.

Afflicted: a disability is not an affliction.

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