

Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction

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Content

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General habits.

- Talk to the person directly, not to their companion, interpreter, or aide.
- Use People First language: a person with a disability, not a disabled person.
- Ask before helping, and accept the answer. Do not assume someone needs help, and do not help without asking.
- Do not touch a person's wheelchair, cane, or service animal. They are part of the person's space.

A few specifics.

- If someone uses a wheelchair, try to position yourself at eye level for a longer conversation.
- With someone who is blind or has low vision, say who you are when you arrive and when you leave, and offer your arm rather than grabbing theirs.
- With someone who is Deaf or hard of hearing, face them, speak naturally, and use a qualified interpreter for anything important.
- With someone who has a speech difference, be patient, do not finish their sentences, and ask them to repeat rather than pretending you understood.
- With someone who has a cognitive or intellectual disability, use plain language, allow time, and check understanding respectfully.

When in doubt, ask. The person is the expert on what works for them. A simple how can I best work with you today is worth more than any list.

Respect is the whole point. Lead with it, follow the person's preferences, and the etiquette takes care of itself.

Use People First language: a person with a disability, not a disabled person.

Ask before helping, and accept the answer. Do not assume someone needs help, and do not help without asking.

Respect is the whole point. Lead with it, follow the person's preferences, and the etiquette takes care of itself.

Choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product using Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction.

Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product.

Choose the sections of Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule.

Document the action taken from Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.

For all staff, use Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product; use the guidance in the immediate task, check impact and access, and ask for help when authority is unclear. Start by use People First language: a person with a disability, not a disabled person.

Do not replace official legal, policy, clinical, supervisory, program, or Tribal authority.

Do not infer an individual's identity, preferences, needs, or experience from group-level information.

State uncertainty, use current authoritative sources, and escalate when the decision exceeds the user's role.

Respectful interaction with people with disabilities is mostly common sense and good manners, with a few habits worth naming. The goal is simple: treat the person as a person, and follow their lead. Step 1. Use People First language: a person with a disability, not a disabled person. Step 2. Ask before helping, and accept the answer. Do not assume someone needs help, and do not help without asking. Step 3. Respect is the whole point. Lead with it, follow the person's preferences, and the etiquette takes care of itself. Step 4. Choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product using Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction. Step 5. Confirm the current purpose, audience, and decision authority before using Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction to choose the relevant guidance, verify fit and currency, and apply it to the work product. Step 6. Choose the sections of Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction that match the situation; do not apply unrelated guidance as a blanket rule. Step 7. Document the action taken from Disability Etiquette and Respectful Interaction, the people affected, unresolved questions, and the responsible follow-up owner.