

# **Disability Etiquette How to Engage with People with Disabilities**

North Dakota Health and Human Services Vocational Rehabilitation

## **General Interaction Tip**

1. When speaking, speak directly to the person, not just the people accompanying them.
2. Be patient, people with disabilities might require more time to process and express themselves. Listen to them.
3. Never pretend to understand what a person is saying. Ask the person to repeat or rephrase.
4. Do not make assumptions about a person's disability or limitations. Ask questions if you are unsure.
5. If you think someone may need assistance, offer to assist but wait for them to respond and respect their decision.

## **Blind or Low Vision**

- Greetings - When meeting the person, identify yourself and others who may be present.
- Departing - Don't leave without excusing yourself first.
- Guiding - When asked to guide someone, never push or pull them. Offer your arm or elbow and walk slightly ahead of them while pointing out locations of doorways, curbs or stairs. Describe basic layout and be specific.
- Guide Dogs - Don't pet or distract them while they are working.

## **Deaf and/or Hearing Loss**

- Get the person's attention before speaking. Maintain eye contact.
- Reduce noise if possible.

- Speak louder if necessary.
- Face the person when talking and don't cover your mouth.
- Speak at a reasonable speed.
- Keep communication simple. It may help to simplify your sentences.
- A sign language interpreter may be needed.
- If they have an interpreter, talk to the person, not the interpreter.

### **Difficulty with Speech**

- Pay attention, be patient and wait for the person to finish what they are saying. Do not finish for the person.
- It is ok to ask people to repeat if you do not understand. Tell them what you did understand.
- Be patient and allow a person who uses assistive technology time to communicate.

#### Interacting with a Wheelchair User

- Personal space Don't push, lean on, or hold onto a wheelchair unless you ask. Give them room when you are communicating with them.
- Eye-to-eye contact Try to put yourself at eye level when you interact.
- Don't assume they need assistance, ask them first.
- Be aware of the distance to accessible restrooms, elevators, curb cuts, and other obstacles such as stairs and hills.

### **Cognitive Impairments**

- Keep communication simple.
- Speak in concrete terms and short sentences.
- Complete 1-step instructions and focus on one topic at a time.

- Allow the person time to respond, ask questions to clarify.
- Focus on the person and pay attention to body language.

## **Using Respectful Language**

Do say: people with disabilities

Don't say: the handicapped or disabled

Do say: a wheelchair user

Don't say: wheelchair-bound

Do say: congenital disability

Don't say: birth defect

Do say: He or she has Down Syndrome

Don't say: He or she is a Down's kid

Do say: He or she has an intellectual or developmental disability

Don't say: mentally retarded, a retard, slow or special

Do say: people who have mental illness, person with a mental or emotional disability

Don't say: the mentally ill, crazy, psycho, mental case

Do say: people who are blind or low vision

Don't say: the blind or blind as a bat

Do say: person who is hard of hearing, Deaf, a person who is deaf

Don't say: hearing-impaired, deaf-mute, deaf and dumb

Don't refer to a person's disability unless it is relevant....Remember, people are people first, disability second!

For more information contact us at 1-800-755-2745 or our website at [www.hhs.nd.gov/vr](http://www.hhs.nd.gov/vr).