Disability Etiquette

Individuals Who are Blind or See Differently
- Identify yourself and introduce him/her to others who are in the group.
- Offer your arm – don’t take his/hers – if he/she needs to be guided.
- Guide a blind person’s hand to a banister to help direct him to a stairway.
- Describe the setting, noting any obstacles.
- If you are giving directions, give specific, non-visual information.
- If you need to leave a person who is blind, let him know.
- Don’t touch the person’s cane or guide dog. The dog is working.
- If the person has a guide dog, walk on the opposite side of the dog. The same goes for a cane.
- Offer to read written information.
- If you serve food to a person who is blind, let him know where everything is on the plate according to a clock orientation.

Individuals Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- When the exchange of information is complex, use an interpreter.
- For simple interaction, writing back and forth is okay. May use computer technology to help.
- Follow the person’s cues to find out if she prefers sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking.
- When speaking, do not obscure your face.
- When using an interpreter, look directly at the person who is deaf.
- Talk directly to the person rather than the interpreter.
- Don’t decide for the person.
- Before speaking, make sure that you get her attention.
- Rephrase, rather than repeat, sentences.
- When talking, face the person.
- Speak clearly.
- There is no need to shout.

Individuals Who Use Wheelchairs or Have Mobility Impairments
- Don’t lean over someone in a wheelchair.
- Don’t push or touch a person’s wheelchair.
- Keep the ramps and wheelchair-accessible doors to your building unlocked and unblocked.
- When talking to a wheelchair user, sit at his/her level.
- Be sure that signs direct wheelchair users to the most-accessible ways around the facility.
- Don’t ask a wheelchair user to hold things for you.

Individuals With Speech Impairments
- Don’t interrupt or finish the person’s sentences.
- If you have trouble understanding, don’t nod. Instead, ask him to repeat.
- Ask him to write information down or to suggest another way of facilitating communication.
- A quiet environment makes communication easier.
- Don’t tease or laugh.

Source: “Disability Etiquette,” United Spinal Association

Provided by READI-Net, a program of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
For more information, call 205-290-4457.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acceptable Terms</th>
<th>Unacceptable Terms</th>
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<tr>
<td>Person – person with a disability.</td>
<td>Cripple, crippled – The image conveyed is of a twisted, deformed, useless body.</td>
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<td>Disability – a general term used for functional limitation that interferes with a person’s ability, for example, to hear, walk, learn, or lift. It may refer to a physical, mental, or sensory condition.</td>
<td>Cerebral palsied, spinal cord injured, etc. Never identify people solely by their disability.</td>
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<td>Person who has had a spinal cord injury, polio, a stroke, etc., or a person who has multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, arthritis, etc.</td>
<td>Victim – People with disabilities do not like to be perceived as victims for the rest of their lives, long after any victimization has occurred.</td>
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<td>Has a disability, has a condition of (spina bifida, etc.), or born without legs, etc.</td>
<td>Defective, defect, deformed, vegetable – These words are offensive, dehumanizing, degrading, and stigmatizing.</td>
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<td>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.</td>
<td>Deaf and dumb – This is as bad as it sounds. Inability to hear or speak does not indicate less intelligence</td>
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<td>Person who has a mental or developmental disability</td>
<td>Retarded, moron, imbecile, idiot – These are offensive to people who bear the label.</td>
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<td>Uses a wheelchair or crutches; a wheelchair user; walks with crutches</td>
<td>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.</td>
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<td>Able-bodied: able to walk, see, hear, etc.; people who are not disabled.</td>
<td>Healthy – When used to contrast with “disability,” “healthy” implies the person with a disability is unhealthy. Many people with disabilities have excellent health.</td>
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<td>People who do not have a disability</td>
<td>Normal – When used as the opposite of “disabled,” implies the person is abnormal. No one wants to be labelled abnormal.</td>
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<td>A person who has (name the disability). Example: A person who has multiple sclerosis.</td>
<td>Afflicted with/suffers from – Most people with disabilities don’t regard themselves as afflicted or suffering continually.</td>
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<td>Afflicted – A disability is not an affliction; an affliction may have caused a disability.</td>
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</table>

Source: Disability Etiquette Handbook, City of Chicago Department of Personnel

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