

## Common courtesies

- Emphasize the person, not the disability. Use person-first language, such as “a boy with a disability” instead of “a disabled boy” or “a woman who uses a wheelchair” instead of “a wheelchair-bound woman.”
- Avoid outdated terms such as “handicapped,” “crippled” or “elderly.”
- If you would like to offer assistance to someone with a disability, ask if she needs assistance before you act and listen to any instructions she may give.
- Consider environmental barriers when you are giving directions to a person who uses a wheelchair or assistive device. Consider distance and weather conditions, and alert him to physical obstacles, such as stairs, curbs and steep hills.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take a person with a disability to speak or accomplish tasks. Let the person set the pace in walking and talking.

*More than 54 million Americans with disabilities are traveling, working, attending school, shopping, and actively participating in their communities. Easter Seals Project ACTION is committed to helping all organizations, including transportation agencies, collaborate with the disability community to better serve customers with disabilities.*

Easter Seals Project ACTION offers additional, free resources and training on transit, motorcoach and taxi customer service; involving people with disabilities in the planning process; and disability sensitivity. Contact ESPA for more information.



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## Including People with Disabilities: Communication & Meeting Etiquette

POCKET GUIDE



*Tips for courteously including people with disabilities in conversations, interviews and meetings.*



## *Tips for courteously including people with disabilities in conversations, interviews and meetings.*

### In conversation

- Communicate with courtesy and respect. Identify yourself and provide your title, if appropriate. Shake hands when appropriate. Never make assumptions about a person's physical or mental abilities.
- When talking with someone who has a disability, speak directly to the person rather than through a companion who may be near.
- When talking with a person who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level to spare you both stiff necks. Do not lean on a person's wheelchair—it is part of his personal space.
- Don't be embarrassed to use phrases such as "See you soon," or "I've got to run." These are common expressions and are unlikely to offend.
- Give whole, unhurried attention when talking to a person who has difficulty speaking. When necessary, ask questions that require short answers. Never pretend to understand what you do not. Repeat what you understand to clarify, and the person's reaction will guide you.
- When speaking through an interpreter to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, speak directly to the person; do not converse with the interpreter.

### Events & Meetings

- When planning events or meetings involving people with disabilities, inquire about their needs.
- The building, parking area, meeting space, restrooms, and water fountains should be accessible.
- If barriers exist, including entrance and doorway barriers, find a way to adapt the space or use another location.
- For meetings, consider whether the path of travel to and from the location, including connections to public transit, is suitable for pedestrians and accessible to pedestrians with disabilities.
- Allow circulation space for wheelchairs, make auditory accommodations and provide meeting materials in alternative formats prior to the meeting.
- Provide a certified sign language interpreter or captioner upon request.



### Additional considerations

When speaking with someone who is blind or has a visual impairment:

- Identify yourself and others who may be with you. Do not leave without letting the person know of your departure.
- When offering to assist, allow the person to take your arm. This will help you to guide rather than propel or lead her.
- When giving directions, use specifics such as "walk till the carpet ends and turn left" or "turn to your right and the door is 10 feet ahead on the right." Instructions can include identifying architectural elements that would provide orientation such as the number of doorways to pass or noticeable changes in the surface underfoot to reach the place that is being sought.

When speaking with someone who is deaf or hard of hearing:

- Face the person to whom you are speaking and do not let objects obstruct his view.
- Do not raise your voice—doing so distorts your lip movement and makes lip reading difficult.