Bridging Bionics
FOUNDATION

Communicating Effectively

The Ten Commandments for Communicating with People with Disabilities:

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter.
2. 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 an acceptable greeting).
3. When meeting a person who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulders).
6. Leaning on or hanging on to a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning on or hanging on to a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
7. Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.
8. When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
9. To get the attention of a person who is deaf, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to determine if the person can read lips. For those who do lip read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself so that you face the light source.
10. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about that?" that seem to

relate to a person's disability. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

Source: National Center for Access Unlimited, 155 North Wacker Dr. Suite 315 Chicago, IL 60606

Wheelchair Etiquette

1. The key concept? Focus on the person, not on his or her disability.
2. It is appropriate to shake hands with a person with a disability, even if they have limited use of their hands or wear an artificial limb.
3. Always ask the person who uses a wheelchair if he or she would like assistance before you jump in to help. Your help may not be needed or wanted.
4. Don't hang or lean on a person's wheelchair. A wheelchair is part of his or her own personal or body space, so don't lean on it, rock it, etc.
5. Speak directly to the person who uses the wheelchair, not to someone who is nearby as if the wheelchair user did not exist.
6. If your conversation lasts more than a few minutes, consider sitting down, etc. to get yourself on the same eye level as the person who uses the wheelchair. It will keep both of you from getting a stiff neck!
7. Don't demean or patronize the person who uses a wheelchair by patting him or her on the head.
8. When giving directions, think about things like travel distance, location of curb cuts and ramps, weather conditions, and physical obstacles that may hinder their travel.
9. Don't discourage children from asking questions of a person who uses a wheelchair about their wheelchair. Open communication helps overcome fearful or misleading attitudes.
10. When a person who uses a wheelchair "transfers" out of the wheelchair to a chair, pew, car, toilet, or bed, do not move the wheelchair out of reach. If you think it would be best to move it for some reason ask the person who uses the wheelchair about the best option for them.
11. It is OK to use expressions like "running along" or "let's go for a walk" when speaking to a person who uses a wheelchair. It is likely they express the idea of moving along in exactly the same way.
12. People who use wheelchairs have varying capabilities. Some people who use wheelchairs can walk with aid or for short distances. They use wheelchairs because they help them to conserve energy and to move about with greater efficiency.
13. Don't classify or think of people who use wheelchairs as "sick." Wheelchairs are used to help people adapt to or compensate for the mobility impairments that result from many non-contagious impairments. Some of these are, for example, spinal cord injury, stroke, amputation, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, post-polio, heart disease, etc.
14. Check your assumptions! Don't assume that using a wheelchair is a tragedy. Wheelchairs when they are self-fitted and well-chosen are actually a means of

freedom that allows the user to move about independently and fully engage in life.

15. Don't pet guide dogs or other service animals…they are working.

Source: https://www.wheelchairnet.org/wcn_townhall/docs/etiquette.html

Person First Language

People-first language is a form of linguistic prescriptivism in English, aiming to avoid perceived and subconscious dehumanization when discussing people with disabilities, as such forming an aspect of disability etiquette.

The basic idea is to impose a sentence structure that names the person first and the condition second, for example, "people with disabilities" rather than "disabled people", in order to emphasize that "they are people first". Because English syntax normally places adjectives before nouns, it becomes necessary to insert relative clauses, replacing, e.g., "asthmatic person" with "a person who has asthma." Furthermore, the use of *to be* is deprecated in favor of using *to have*.

The speaker is thus expected to internalize the idea of a disability as a secondary attribute, not a characteristic of a person's identity. Critics of this rationale point out that separating the "person" from the "trait" implies that the trait is inherently bad or "less than", and thus dehumanizes people with disabilities.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People-first_language

Person with a disability	Handicapped/Cripple
Person with _CP, MS, Spina Bifida Victim	Victim of
Little person	Dwarf
Person of short stature	Midget
Person who is deaf	The Deaf/Stone Deaf
Person who is hard of hearing	Deaf & Dumb
Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined to a wheelchair
Wheelchair user	Wheelchair-bound
Person with mental, cognitive or emotional disability	Mentally ill, Crazy, Mentally Disturbed
Person with learning disability	Slow/Stupid/Retarded

Person who is developmentally disabled	Retard/Stupid/Slow
Person with Cerebral Palsy	Spastic
Person who is blind	The Blind