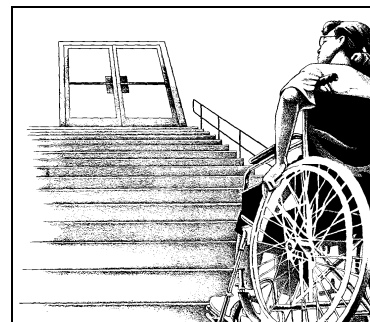
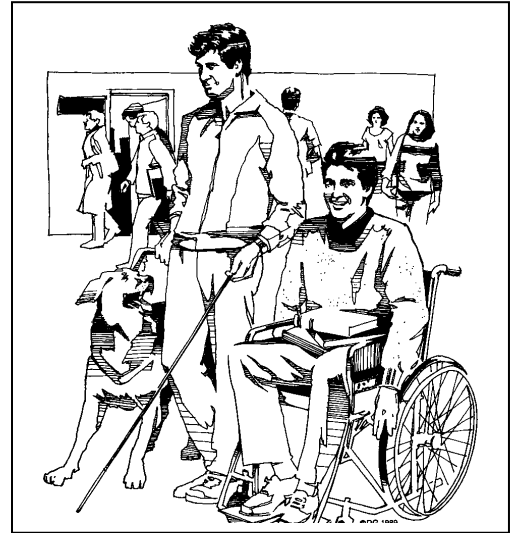


# A Disability Etiquette Handbook



City of Seattle Greg Nickels, Mayor  
Seattle Office for Civil Rights

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**This booklet is available in  
alternative formats upon request.**

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## **PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

People with disabilities are not conditions or diseases; they are individual human beings. For example, an individual is not "an epileptic," but rather "a person who has epilepsy." First and foremost, they are people; only secondarily do they have one or more disabling conditions. Hence, they prefer to be referred to, in print or in the broadcast media, as PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

In any story, article, announcement or advertisement, "people with disabilities" should be used either exclusively or, at a minimum, as the initial reference. Subsequent references can use the terms "person with a disability" or "individuals with disabilities" for grammatical or narrative reasons.

Please refer to the GLOSSARY OF ACCEPTABLE TERMS contained within this handbook for a complete listing of appropriate terms and applications.

## **DISTINCTION BETWEEN DISABILITY AND HANDICAP**

A **DISABILITY** is a condition caused by accident, trauma, genetics or disease which may limit a person's mobility, hearing, vision, speech or mental function. Some people with disabilities have one or more disabilities.

A **HANDICAP** is a physical or attitudinal constraint that is imposed upon a person, regardless of whether that person has a disability. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines handicap as "to put to a disadvantage."

### **EXAMPLE:**

Some people with disabilities use wheelchairs. Stairs, narrow doorways and curbs are handicaps imposed upon people with disabilities who use wheelchairs.

People with disabilities have all manner of disabling conditions – mobility disabilities, blindness and vision disabilities, deafness and hearing loss, speech and language disabilities, and mental and learning disabilities.

## **AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT**

The Americans with Disabilities Act was signed into law on July 26, 1990. The purpose of the Act is to:

- provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate to end discrimination against individuals with disabilities;

- provide enforceable standards addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities; and
- ensure that the federal government plays a central role in enforcing these standards on behalf of individuals with disabilities.

The term "disability" is defined as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of a person's major life activities, a record of such impairment, or being regarded as having such an impairment. This is the same definition used in Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Fair Housing Amendments Act.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) gives people with disabilities civil rights protection that are like those provided to individuals on the basis of race, sex, national origin, and religion. It guarantees equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities in employment, public accommodations, transportation, state and local government services and telecommunications.

### **Title I: Employment**

- Employers with 15 or more employees (one in the City of Seattle) may not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities.
- Employers must reasonably accommodate the disabilities of qualified applicants or employees, unless an undue hardship would result.
- Employers may reject applicants or fire employees who pose a direct threat to the health or safety of other individuals in the workplace.
- Applicants and employees are not protected from personnel actions based on their current illegal use of drugs. Drug testing is not affected.
- Employers may not discriminate against a qualified applicant or employee because of the known disability of an individual with whom the applicant or employee is known to have a relationship or association.

### **Title II: State and Local Government Operations**

State and local governments may not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities. All government facilities, programs, services, activities, and communications must be accessible consistent with the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

### **Title III: Public Accommodations**

- Public accommodations such as restaurants, hotels, theaters, doctors' offices, pharmacies, retail stores, museums, libraries, parks, private schools, and day care centers may not discriminate on the basis of disabilities.
- Reasonable changes in policies, practices, and procedures must be made to avoid discrimination.
- Auxiliary aids and services must be provided to individuals with vision or hearing disabilities or other individuals with disabilities so that they can have an equal opportunity to participate or benefit, unless an undue burden would result.
- Physical barriers in existing facilities must be removed if removal is readily achievable (i.e. easily accomplishable and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense). If not, alternative methods of providing the services must be offered, if those methods are readily achievable.
- All new construction in public accommodations, as well as in "commercial facilities" such as office buildings, must be accessible. If such facilities are located in multi-story buildings, accessible elevators are generally required to serve all floors. Exemptions may be granted under certain conditions outlined in ADA Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). (Washington State Uniform Building Code 51-40.)
- Alterations must be accessible. When alterations to primary function areas are made, an accessible path of travel to the altered area (and the restrooms, telephones, and drinking fountains serving that area) must be provided to the extent that added accessibility costs are not disproportionate to the overall cost of the alterations. Elevators are required as described above.
- Entities such as hotels that also offer transportation generally must provide equivalent transportation service to individuals with disabilities. New fixed route vehicles ordered on or after August 26, 1990 and capable of carrying more than 16 passengers, must be accessible.
- Public accommodations may not discriminate against an individual or entity because of the known disability of an individual with whom the individual or entity is known to have a relationship or association.

## **Title IV: Telecommunications Relay Services**

Companies offering telephone service to the general public must offer telephone relay services to individuals who use teletypewriters (TTYs) or similar devices.

### **REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE WORK PLACE**

Reasonable accommodations enhance the opportunity for qualified people with disabilities who may not otherwise be considered for reasons unrelated to actual job requirements to be/remain employed. The purpose of providing reasonable accommodations is to enable employers to hire or retain qualified job candidates regardless of their disability, by eliminating barriers in the work place.

According to the Department of Justice Government-Wide Regulations, Section 41.53 entitled REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION, "A recipient shall make reasonable accommodation to the known physical or mental limitations of an otherwise qualified handicapped applicant or employee unless the recipient can demonstrate that the accommodation would impose an undue hardship on the operation of its program."

Inquiries made of an individual about limitations in job performance must be directly related to the prospective or existing position. Accommodations are tailored for a certain job or situation that an individual is hired to perform. The law requires that each person with a disability must be consulted prior to the planning and be involved in the implementation of an accommodation.

Types of accommodations include assistive devices, reassignment, modified work schedules, job modifications, relocation, or a change in the physical plant.

Examples of assistive devices often used in the work place include:

Teletypewriters (TTYs), telephone amplifiers for people with hearing loss, wooden blocks to elevate desks and tables for wheelchair users, and large-type computer terminals and Braille printers to assist people with vision disabilities.

Decisions to implement an accommodation should include making a choice that will best meet the needs of the individual by minimizing limitation and enhancing his/her ability to perform job tasks, while serving the interests of your majority work force.

### **RECEPTION ETIQUETTE**

Know where accessible restrooms, drinking fountains and telephones are located. If such facilities are not available, be ready to offer alternatives (e.g. the private/employee restroom, a glass of water, your desk phone).

1. Use a normal tone of voice when extending a verbal welcome. Do not raise your voice unless requested.

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.
  - a. Shaking hands with the left hand is acceptable.
  - b. For those who cannot shake hands, touch the person on the shoulder or arm to welcome and acknowledge their presence.
3. Treat adults in a manner befitting adults:
  - a. Call a person by his or her first name only when extending that familiarity to all others present.
  - b. Never patronize people using wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.
4. When addressing a person who uses a wheelchair, never lean on the person's wheelchair. The chair is part of the space that belongs to the person who uses it.
5. When talking with a person who has a disability, look at and speak directly to that person, rather than through a companion who may be along.
6. If an interpreter is present, speak to the person who has scheduled the appointment, not to the interpreter. Always maintain eye contact with the applicant, not the interpreter.
7. Offer assistance in a dignified manner with sensitivity and respect. Be prepared to have the offer declined. Do not proceed to assist, if your offer to assist is declined. If the offer is accepted, listen to, or accept instructions.
  - a) Allow a person with a vision disability to take your arm (at or about the elbow). This will enable you to guide rather than propel or lead the person.
  - b) Offer to hold or carry packages in a welcome manner.  
EXAMPLE: "May I help you with your packages?"

When offering to take a coat or umbrella, do not offer to take a cane or crutches unless the individual requests otherwise.

## CONVERSATION ETIQUETTE

1. When talking to a person with a disability, look at and speak directly to that person, rather than through a companion who may be along.
2. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted common expressions such as "See you later" or "Got to be running along" that seem to relate to the person's disability.
3. To get the attention of a person who is Deaf or hard of hearing, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, naturally and slowly to establish if the person can read lips. Not all people who are Deaf or hard of hearing can lip-read. Those who can will rely on facial expression and other body language to help in understanding. Show consideration by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping your hands, cigarettes, and food away from your mouth when speaking. Keep mustaches well trimmed. Shouting won't help. Written notes may.
4. When talking with a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, utilize a chair, whenever possible, in order to place yourself at the person's eye level to facilitate conversation.
5. When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. Say, for example, "On my right is Penelope Potts." When conversing in a group, give a vocal cue by announcing the name of the person to whom you are speaking. Speak in a normal tone of voice, indicate in advance when you will be moving from one place to another, and let it be known when the conversation is at an end.
6. Listen attentively when you're talking to a person who has a speech disability. Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting. Exercise patience rather than attempting to speak for a person with speech difficulty. When necessary ask short questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Repeat what you understand, or incorporate interviewer's statements into each of the following questions. The person's reactions will clue you in and guide you to understanding.

If you have difficulty communicating, be willing to repeat or rephrase a question. Open-ended questions are more appropriate than closed-ended questions.

EXAMPLE:

**Closed-ended question:** How many years did you work as a tax accountant at XYZ Company?

**Open-ended question:** What did you do in your recent position as a tax accountant?

7. Do not shout at a person who is Deaf or hard of hearing. Shouting distorts sounds accepted through hearing aids and inhibits lip reading. Do not shout at a person who is blind or has low vision – s/he can hear you!
8. In order to facilitate conversation, be prepared to offer a visual cue to someone with hearing loss or an audible cue to someone who is blind or has low vision, especially when more than one person is speaking.

## INTERVIEWING SCHEDULING ETIQUETTE

Some interviewees with visual or mobility disabilities will phone in prior to the appointment date, specifically for travel information. The scheduler should be very familiar with the travel path in order to provide interviewees with detailed directions.

1. Make sure the place where you plan to conduct the interview is accessible by checking the following:
  - a) Are there accessible parking spaces available and nearby?
  - b) Is there a ramp or step-free entrance?
  - c) Are there accessible restrooms?
  - d) If the interview is not on the first floor, does the building have an elevator?
  - e) Are there any water fountains and telephones at the proper height for a person in a wheelchair to use?
  - f) If an interview site is inaccessible (e.g. steps without a ramp, or a building without an elevator), inform the person about the barrier prior to the interview, and offer to make arrangements for an alternative interview site.
2. When scheduling interviews for people with disabilities consider their needs ahead of time.
  - a) When giving directions to someone who uses a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs, and steep hills.

- b) Use specifics such as "left a hundred feet" or "right two yards" when directing a person with a vision disability.
  - c) Be considerate of the additional travel time that may be required by a person with a disability.
4. Familiarize the interviewee in advance with the names of all people he/she will be meeting during his/her visit. This courtesy allows people with disabilities to be aware of the names/faces s/he will be meeting.
  5. People with disabilities utilize a variety of transportation services when traveling to and from work. When scheduling an interview, be aware that the person may be required to make a reservation 24 hours in advance, plus travel time. Provide the interviewee with an estimated time to schedule their return trip when arranging the interview appointment.

Expect the same measure of punctuality and performance from people with disabilities that is required by every potential or actual employee.

People with disabilities expect equal treatment, not special treatment.

## **INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUE ETIQUETTE**

1. Conduct interviews in a manner that emphasizes abilities, achievements and individual qualities.
2. Conduct your interview as you would with anyone. Be considerate without being patronizing.
3. When interviewing a person with a speech disability, stifle any urge to complete a sentence of the interviewee.
4. If it appears that a person's ability inhibits performance of a job ask: "How would you perform this job?"

### **EXAMPLES:**

**Inappropriate:** I notice that you are in a wheelchair, and I wonder how you get around. Tell me about your disability.

**Appropriate:** This position requires digging and using a wheelbarrow, as you can see from the job description. Do you foresee any difficulty in performing the required tasks? If so, do you have any suggestions as to how these tasks can be performed?

## **INTERVIEWING COURTESIES**

Interviewers need to know whether or not the job site is accessible and should be prepared to answer accessibility related questions.

### **Interviewing people using mobility aids**

1. Allow people who use crutches, canes or wheelchairs to keep them within reach.
2. Be aware that some wheelchair users may choose to transfer themselves out of their wheelchairs, into an office chair, for the duration of the interview.
3. When speaking to a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, sit in a chair. Place yourself at that person's eye level to facilitate conversation.

### **Interviewing people with vision disabilities**

1. When greeting a person with a vision disability, always identify yourself and introduce anyone else who might be present.
2. If the person does not extend their hand (to shake hands), verbally extend a welcome.
3. When offering seating, guide the person's hand to the back or arm of the seat. Place your hand under theirs and moving it to the chair back or arm. The individual will then slide his/her hand onto the chair and sit down. A verbal cue is helpful as well to prevent any unintended insult or discomfort.
4. Let the person know if you move or need to end the conversation. Allow people who use crutches, canes or wheelchairs to keep them within reach.

### **Interviewing people with speech disabilities**

1. Give your whole attention with interest when talking to a person who has a speech disability.
2. Ask short questions that require short answers or a nod of the head.
3. Do not pretend to understand if you do not. Try rephrasing what you wish to communicate, or ask the person to repeat what you do not understand.
4. Do not raise your voice. Most speech-disabled people can hear and understand.

### **Interviewing people who are Deaf or hard of hearing**

1. If you need to attract the attention of a person who is Deaf or hard of hearing, touch him/her lightly on the shoulder.
2. If the interviewee lip-reads, look directly at him/her. Speak clearly at a normal pace. Do not exaggerate your lip movements or shout. Speak expressively because the person will rely on your facial expressions, gestures and eye contact. (Note: It is estimated that only 4 out of 10 spoken words are visible on the lips.)
3. Place yourself facing the light source and keep your hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking.
4. Shouting does not help and can be detrimental. Only raise your voice when requested. Brief, concise written notes may be helpful.
5. In the United States most Deaf people use American Sign Language (ASL). ASL is not a universal language. ASL is a language with its own syntax and grammatical structure. When scheduling an interpreter for a non-English speaking person, be certain to retain an interpreter that speaks and interprets in the language of the person.
6. If an interpreter is present, it is common for the interpreter to be seated beside the interviewer, across from the interviewee.
7. Interpreters facilitate communication. They should not be consulted or regarded as a reference for the interview.

**When referring to people with disabilities,  
choose words that reflect dignity and respect.**

<b>Inappropriate language</b>	<b>Appropriate language</b>
The disabled	people with disabilities, the disability community ("disabled" is an adjective and therefore must be accompanied by a noun)
Crippled, suffers from, afflicted with, stricken with, victim of, invalid	has a disability, is a person with a disability, physically disabled, walks with a cane, uses leg braces
normal person, healthy, whole	non-disabled, person without disabilities, able-bodied
the blind, the deaf	person who is blind, person who is Deaf or hard of hearing
wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair person	wheelchair user, person who uses a wheelchair
handicap parking, disabled parking	accessible parking, disability parking
dumb, mute	person who cannot speak, has difficulty speaking, uses synthetic speech, is non-vocal, non-verbal
stutterer, tongue-tied	person who has a speech or communication disability
CP victim, spastic	person with cerebral palsy
epileptic	person with epilepsy, person with seizure disorder
fit, attack	seizure, epileptic episode or event
crazy, lunatic, insane, nuts, deranged, psycho	people with emotional disorders, mental illness, mental disability, psychiatric disability
retard, mentally defective, moron, idiot, imbecile, Down's person, Mongoloid	developmentally disabled, developmentally delayed, person with mental retardation, person with Down syndrome
slow learner, retarded	has a learning disability, person with specific learning disability
dwarf, midget	person of small stature, short stature; little person
paraplegic, quadriplegic	man with paraplegia, woman who is paralyzed, person with spinal cord injury
birth defect	congenital disability, disabled from birth
post-polio, suffered from polio	person who had polio
homebound	stay-at-home, hard for the person to get out

While "impairment" is sometimes used within a legal context, most members of the disability community prefer the word "disability" to "impairment."