

INCLUSIVE ETIQUETTE WHEN INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Ask before you help

Just because a person has a disability doesn't mean they want or need assistance. Never help someone without asking them first.

Think before you speak

Be sure to use inclusive and up-to-date terminology when talking about disabilities. You can find a downloadable guide to inclusive language on the [Accessibility at IE homepage](#).

Avoid showing pity

People with disabilities aren't victims. When interacting with a person with a disability, don't use pet names or patronizing speech, and don't talk down to them as if they were children.

Remember it's not one-size-fits-all

There is a wide range of types and levels of disability, so every situation is unique. The most important thing is to always be respectful.

Here are some basic guidelines to keep in mind when interacting with people with specific types of disabilities:

1. When interacting with someone who is deaf or hard-of-hearing, remember that some individuals may be able to hear to a certain extent, some may be able to lip read, and others prefer to solely use sign language or assistive technology. Rather than assuming, ask them how they prefer to communicate and they will make it clear.
2. When interacting with someone who is blind or visually impaired, always 1) introduce yourself when you arrive and 2) let them know when you're leaving. You may offer your arm or elbow as a guide if they request assistance, but never push, pull, or grab the individual. If they're with a guide dog, do not pet or play with it. The dog is consistently working to ensure its owner's safety – it's not a pet!
3. When interacting with someone who uses a wheelchair, do not push, lean on, or hold the wheelchair. If possible, try to put yourself at eye level when talking with the person in the wheelchair.
4. When interacting with someone with a cognitive/intellectual disability, speak as clearly and directly as possible. Be patient and give them time to communicate with you. But remember – every person is different, and it may not be necessary

to adjust your speech. When in doubt, ask; for example, “Do you prefer that I speak slower?” If you’re having trouble understanding them, ask them to elaborate or clarify, while maintaining an encouraging and kind attitude.

5. When interacting with someone with a speech impairment, allow them as much time as they need to communicate. Be respectful and avoid trying to finish their sentences.
6. Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to their companions, aids, or interpreters.

When in doubt, stick with the golden rule

It’s simple: treat everyone as you’d like to be treated. Think of the person first, not their disability. And don’t shy away from people with disabilities for fear of offending them – just relax and be yourself.