

Etiquette Tips for Working with People with Disabilities

- Ask people if they need anything to make the process more effective or easier for them.
- If you think a person needs assistance, always ask before helping them.
- Don't make assumptions about a person's abilities. The individual is the best judge of what he/she can or cannot do.
- Make eye contact and speak to the person directly (rather than their personal care attendant or interpreter, for example).
- Speak with people using your normal volume and pace, unless they ask you to speak louder or slower.
- If you don't understand what someone is saying, ask the person to repeat it or offer another form of communication (such as paper/pen or a computer) for clarification.
- If you are working with someone who uses a wheelchair or mobility device, do not lean on it. Also, if you are speaking with them for a prolonged period of time, sit in a chair to be at their level.
- If you are working with someone who is blind, clearly identify yourself when you first arrive and be sure to let him or her know when you are leaving the conversation or room. Also, offer to read any written information. Finally, give them your arm and gently guide them if requested.
- If you are working with a person who has a developmental disability, use clear sentences, simple words, and concrete concepts. Gauge the pace, complexity, and vocabulary of your speech to match theirs. And, unless you are informed otherwise, remember he or she can make his or her own decisions.
- If you are working with someone who has a service dog, ask permission before touching the animal.
- Relax. Mistakes are human, just be willing to learn from them.
- Most importantly, if you don't know what to do or what something means, ask the person. They are the experts on their needs and how to best meet them.