



Disability Etiquette *Tips*

A final word...

People with disabilities are individuals with families, jobs, hobbies, likes and dislikes, problems and joys. While the disability is an integral part of who they are, it alone does not define them. Don't make them into disability heroes or victims. Treat them as individuals.

- Don't make decisions for people with disabilities about what they can or can't do.
- People with disabilities, like everyone else, have different personalities and different preferences about how to do things.
- Always ask before you assist a person with a disability, and then listen carefully to any instructions. Do not interfere with a person's full control over his/her own assistive devices.
- People with disabilities expect equal treatment, not special treatment.

We're here to help.

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- Keep accessible paths of travel clear.
- When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs and steep hills.
- When you meet someone with a disability, it is appropriate to shake hands – even if a person has limited or no use of their hands. Simply touch hands to acknowledge his/her presence.
- Some terms that might have sounded acceptable in the past, such as ‘crippled’, ‘handicapped’ and ‘wheelchair-bound’ are no longer accepted as many have negative associations. Instead, put the person first and the disability second like ‘person with a disability’ or ‘Denise uses a wheelchair’.
- Usually people with disabilities do not want to make the origin or details of their disability the first topic of conversation. In general, it’s best not to ask personal questions until you’ve become well acquainted.



14% of the Canadian population has a disability. There is a good chance that you interact every day with somebody who has a disability, perhaps without even knowing it.

Sometimes people are uncomfortable around people with disabilities because they don’t know how to act or what to say. Here are some general tips to ease your comfort with people with mobility impairments.



- Don’t lean on a person’s wheelchair – it’s considered an extension of personal space.
- Never patronize people using wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.
- Don’t pet a companion dog while it’s working.
- Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to his companion.
- Relax. Don’t be embarrassed to use common expressions such as “I’ve got to run now,” or “go for a walk” even if the person doesn’t run or walk. People with disabilities use these phrases all the time.
- Whatever you do, don’t let the fear of saying or doing something wrong prevent you from getting to know someone who has a disability. If you are unsure of what to say when you first meet, try “Hello”.