

What Do You Say?

Serving Disabled Guests

SOME GENERAL RULES OF DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

As we mentioned earlier, people often feel uncomfortable with what they don't understand. That's not wrong, it's just human. For example, people may be afraid of offending guests with disabilities by using the wrong words or phrases when serving them. That's a pretty common concern. For that reason, we have included some general rules of disability etiquette to use as a guideline to better serve your guests.

Preferred Terminology

Blind (no visual capability)

Legally blind/low vision (some visual capability)

Hemiplegic (paralysis of one side of the body)

Paraplegia (loss of function in lower body only)

Quadriplegia (paralysis of both arms and legs)

■ Say

"Person with a disability..."

■ DON'T Say

"Handicapped," "handicap," "cripple" or "invalid" (which means "not valid")

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■ Say

"Deaf" refers to a person who does not voice for themselves or is non-vocal.

"Deafness" refers to a person who has a total loss of hearing.

"Hearing impaired" refers to a person who has a partial loss of hearing.

■ **DON'T Say**

“Deaf and dumb” or “deaf mute.” Those phrases really are as bad as they sound. The inability to hear or speak does not indicate intelligence.

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■ **Say**

“Person who has” or “person with...” in reference to a person who has something such as a spinal cord injury or multiple sclerosis.

■ **DON'T Say**

“Victim,” “afflicted with” or “suffers from,” such as *“victim of a stroke”* or *“afflicted with cerebral palsy.”* People with disabilities do not like to be perceived as victims and don’t see themselves as afflicted or suffering continually.

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■ **Say**

“Uses a wheelchair...”

■ **DON'T Say**

“Wheelchair bound” or “confined/restricted to a wheelchair.” Most people who use a wheelchair or other mobility devices do not see them as confining—they are a tool that allows the user the freedom to move.

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■ **Say**

“Disabled since birth” or “born with...”

■ **DON'T Say**

“Birth defect.”

- **Say**

“Person who has a mental or developmental disability...”

- **DON'T Say**

“Retarded,” “moron,” “slow” or “stupid.” These words are all degrading and offensive.

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- **Say**

“Mental illness,” “psychiatric disability / psychiatric history” or “emotional disorder...”

- **DON'T Say**

“Mental patient,” “insane,” “crazy” or “lunatic.”

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- **Say**

“Epilepsy” or “seizures...”

- **DON'T Say**

“Fits...”

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- **Say**

“Able-bodied” or “able to walk, see, hear,” etc. in reference to people who do not have a disability.

- **DON'T Say**

“Normal” or “healthy” (in contrast with disabled.) “Healthy” implies that a person with a disability is unhealthy, which is not accurate.

CONVERSATION

When talking with a person with a disability, look at and speak directly to that person rather than through a companion who may be along. For people who communicate through sign language, speak to them, not to the interpreter.

To get the attention of a person who has a hearing disability, wave your hand or tap the person on the shoulder. Look directly at the person and speak clearly to them.

Use a normal tone of voice when extending a verbal welcome and in general conversation. Don't raise your voice unless someone asks you to. Shouting won't help, but writing notes may.

If you are talking for more than a few minutes with a person who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level with that person. Never patronize people using wheelchairs by patting them on the head.

Never lean on a person's wheelchair. It is considered part of that person's space and would be similar to hanging on a person.

When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to shake hands just as you do with everyone you meet. If a person is unable to shake, he or she will tell you.

When greeting someone with a severe loss of vision, it is helpful to identify yourself and others. "On my left is Mary Isler."

Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions like "see you tomorrow" or "gotta run" that may seem connected to a person's disability. People with disabilities use these phrases too.

Most important, if you are in doubt as to how to communicate with or help a guest who has a disability of some sort, just ask the person how you can best assist him or her. Such guests will take the lead in asking for help or telling you that they don't need any.

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