

Courtesy Rules Upon Meeting A Disabled Person

Often, when meeting a person with an obvious disability, awkwardness may be avoided if certain basic rules are followed:

1. Assume that the individual is an adult and capable of ordinary means of communication; that is, don't raise your voice or address the person as you might speak to a child. Don't inquire of others what the person might want - cream in the coffee, or location of the bathroom. Speak to the person, and he or she will respond.
2. If a person with any obvious disability is walking with you, do not take his or her arm or seize hold of the wheelchair or whatever device he or she is using, and do not take hold of a guide dog's harness. Let the disabled person take your arm or let you know what is needed. Simply ask if your help is needed.
3. It is good to let someone who cannot see know who is in the room when he or she enters, and to introduce the person with a disability to the others in the room, including the children. To help a blind person to a seat, simply place his or her hand on the back of a chair, to orient him or her to its direction.
4. The door to a room, cabinet, or car left partially open is a hazard, especially to someone who is very tall or who cannot see it.
5. At dinner or breakfast it would be good to inform someone who cannot see what is on the table or what is being served. In the case of someone who has another physical limitation, ask how you may be of assistance.
6. Don't avoid words like "see" or "walk" because persons with disabilities use these words as readily as anyone else.
7. Persons with disabilities do not want pity or patronizing praise. Do not assume that because someone has a limitation, other senses are more acute. That is simply not true. Certainly, if someone must depend on memory more than usual, it simply means memory may be more developed because it is needed.
8. If you have a houseguest with special needs, simply inform him or her of the location of the facilities, and of what is available for use, and assume that will be adequate.
9. If you are curious about someone's disability, you may inquire about this when you are better acquainted. Remember, it's an old story for him or her. Many other interests have occupied his or her life, and it is to these that any person with or without a disability would far more happily turn for mature discussion.
10. The ultimate rule is to realize that each human being is a person with rich potential and special gifts, and it is these that make the individual worth knowing.

In all fifty states, the law requires drivers to yield the right of way when they see a white cane or guide dog or wheelchair. In fact, more persons with all sorts of limitations are visible in society today because attitudes are changing and opportunities are becoming more available.

The Disabled Disciple
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