

Building Disability Etiquette in the Workplace



Building disability etiquette in the workplace is an important step in creating an accessible and inclusive workplace. Here are some general suggestions to follow to ensure mindful and respectful interactions with employees with disabilities:

- Speak directly to the person with a disability, even when an interpreter or support person accompanies them.
- Offer your assistance, but wait until your offer is accepted before you help.
- Always listen and follow the instructions the person has given you.
- If a service animal is present, refrain from interacting with it, unless you've been given permission.
- Do not make assumptions, always ask questions when you are unsure.
- Respect personal space.
- Things will not always go as planned, if you make a mistake, apologize and take the opportunity to learn about that person's preferences or needs.

The following chart outlines some key suggestions about your interactions with people who have different types of disabilities.

DISABILITY TYPE	SUGGESTED ETIQUETTE
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to place yourself at eye level when speaking with a person in a wheelchair • Be mindful that some wheelchair users may prefer to transfer into a chair • Never lean or hold a person's mobility device, this is their personal space • Refrain from physical contact, gripping or leaning on someone. This could impair their balance • Allow space for mobility aids to remain within reach
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As you approach, state your name and who you are • In a group, identify yourself and the person you are speaking to • Always ask before leading someone, if they accept, allow the person to hold your arm so they are in control of their own movements • Give descriptive directions • Inform the person if you move, if someone leaves or enters the room or if you need to end the conversation • Orient the person when entering a space, especially if barriers are present or there have been changes to the physical environment
Speech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not try to finish someone's sentences or find their words • If you have trouble understanding someone's speech, ask for them to repeat what they've said or verify that you've understood them correctly

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DISABILITY TYPE	SUGGESTED ETIQUETTE
Hearing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not shout, this may distort the sound in a hearing device Ensure you have the person's attention before speaking, maintain eye contact When there is no interpreter available, communicate in writing or by text If the person lip reads, look directly at them, do not cover your face or mouth, speak clearly, at a regular pace
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refrain from pointing out physical signs or symptoms of someone with a suspected or known mental health concern Always be flexible, patient and open-minded Provide support and assistance, as appropriate
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask the person how they prefer to receive information (i.e. verbal or written) Treat the person as an adult, but use language that matches their level of complexity or understanding Allow the individual time to think about their response
Neurodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use clear and simple language Avoid using metaphors, euphemisms and sarcasm as this may cause confusion, if you do, be prepared to explain what you mean Ask one question at a time Give clear instructions Don't assume that their body language (e.g. less eye contact) equates to disinterest



If you still have questions or you are interested in learning more about building disability etiquette in the workplace, seek advice or consultations from organizations that serve and/or support people with disabilities in your community!

Sources:

Job Accommodation Network: Accommodation and Compliance: Disability Etiquette — www.askjan.org/topics/disetiqa.cfm

Humber College: Inclusive Language in Media, A Canadian Style Guide — www.humber.ca/makingaccessiblemedia/modules/01/transcript/Inclusive_Language_Guide_Aug2017.pdf

Canadian Association of Broadcasters: Recommended Guidelines on Language and Terminology - Persons with Disabilities — https://www.cab-acr.ca/english/social/diversity/disabilities/pwd_guidelines.htm