

## Understanding our Culture

### Disability Etiquette

Practicing disability etiquette is an easy way to make people with disabilities feel welcome. You don't have to feel awkward when dealing with a person who has a disability. If you are ever unsure about what to do or say with a person who has a disability, just ask.

Here are some tips:

#### **Ask before you help**

Just because someone has a disability, don't assume he or she needs help. If the setting is accessible, people with disabilities can usually get around fine. Adults with disabilities want to be treated as independent people. Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it. And if the person does want help, ask how before you act.

#### **Be sensitive about physical contact**

Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance. Grabbing them—even if your intention is to assist—could knock them off balance. Avoid patting a person on the head or touching his or her wheelchair, scooter, or cane. People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.

#### **Think before you speak**

Always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to his companion, aide, or sign language interpreter. Making small talk with a person who has a disability is simple; just talk to him/her as you would with anyone else. Respect his/her privacy. If you ask about his/her disability, he/she may feel like you are treating him as a disability, not as a human being. (However, many people with disabilities are comfortable with children's natural curiosity and do not mind if a child asks them questions.)

#### **Don't make assumptions**

People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. Don't make decisions for them about participating in any activity. Depending on the situation, it could be a violation of the ADA to exclude people because of a presumption about their limitations.

#### **Respond graciously to requests**

When people who have a disability ask for accommodation at your business, it is not a complaint. It shows they feel comfortable enough in your establishment to ask for what they need. And if they get a positive response, they will probably come back again and tell their friends about the good service they received.

From the Shepherd Center, Atlanta, Georgia