COMMUNICATING WITH PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

An Overview for Commencement Volunteers

Office of Disability Services
Texas State University
Overview

• Assisting persons with various disabilities
• Tips
• Questions
A Range of Disabilities

• Blind and visually impaired
• Speech impairment
• Deaf and hard of hearing
• Wheelchair users
• Other mobility impairments
• Social Disabilities
• Invisible Disabilities
Blind & Visually Impaired

- When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others who may be with you.
Relax

Assisting blind and visually impaired persons:
• Offer to serve as a guide for a person who is blind
• Give notice of upcoming obstacles
• Don’t be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions such as "See you later" that seem to relate to the person's disability.
Speech Impairment

Assisting persons who have impaired speech:
• Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking.
• Be patient and wait for the person to finish rather than correcting or speaking for the person.
• If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers.
• Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.
Deaf & Hard of Hearing

- Speak directly to the person with a disability
- Do not communicate to a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present
Attention

To get the attention of a deaf/hard of hearing person:
  - Tap on shoulder
  - Wave your hand

Look directly at the person
Speak slowly and expressively
Don’t yell
Wheelchair Users

- Offer assistance but wait until it is accepted before you start to push their chair
- Don’t lean or hang on a person’s wheelchair
- Put yourself at eye level
- Don’t pat a wheelchair user on their head
- A small bump can cause a jolt
Mobility Impaired

- Like a wheelchair, a cane or crutches is an extension of the person
- Don’t assume limitations
Invisible Disabilities: Anxiety, PTSD, ASD, and ADHD

• **Considerations:**
  - Environment
  - Circumstance
  - Nonverbal cues and behavior
  - Eye contact
Tips

• Service animal etiquette
• Treat adults as adults
• Don’t patronize
• Always ask first
• Listen attentively
• Be patient
• Be yourself!
• REMEMBER: Person first, disability second
Person First Language

**ALWAYS put the person FIRST**

**DON'TS**
Disrespectful terms
- crippled, spastic
- retard, mongoloid
- dumb/deaf-mute
- handicap
- fit
- insane, crazy, deranged
- wheelchair bound/confined
- differently-abled
- stricken, victim or suffering from
- patient
- handicapped parking/seating
- special bus, special housing
- the disabled
- the blind
- disabled rights or group

**DOs**
Respectful terms
- cerebral palsy/paraplegia/ physical disability
- cognitive or intellectual impairment
- communication disorder/ unable to speak/deaf
- disability
- epilepsy/seizure
- psychiatric disability
- uses a wheelchair
- avoid trendy or cute terms
- had or has a disability
- use only if the person is under a doctor's care
- accessible parking/seating
- separate bus, segregated housing
- person with a disability, people who are blind
- disability rights, disability advocates/community
Questions

Contact the Office of Disability Services
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