

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The following are guidelines for appropriate behavior when addressing people with disabilities seeking accommodation to access our courts. If a person with a disability comes to the courthouse requesting an accommodation, the first thing that you should do is talk with the person and find out what type of accommodation is being requested. Next, you should have the person fill out a [request form](#), providing assistance if needed, and contact the local ADA coordinator or Jury Commissioner to review the request.

People with disabilities prefer that you treat them like anyone else and that you focus on their abilities, not their disabilities. The person should always be stressed first. The term "handicapped" should be avoided. Many people who have disabilities would never think of themselves as "handicapped". The preferred usage is "people with disabilities." The term "disabled person" is acceptable, but this term still defines a person as disabled first and a person second. Using terms such as "handicapped" or "disabled" may evoke feelings of sadness, pity, fear, and create a stereotypical perception that people with disabilities are all alike.

Special Considerations for Judges in the Courtroom

- Set the right tone by being supportive of requests for accommodation made by people with disabilities appearing in your courtroom. These people are entitled to participate in the judicial system and depend on you to ensure their full and effective participation.
- Train your staff, including bailiffs, to be sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities. Patience and flexibility are important, because many will not be familiar with the procedures and practices of the court.
- Disabilities are not always visible, and not all people with a particular disability need the same accommodation. Allow yourself to be educated by the person about his or her disability and needs—he or she is often best equipped to suggest the best way to accommodate his or her needs.
- If in doubt, contact your local ADA Coordinator (usually your district administrator or chief probation officer) or the Human Resources Division of the State Court Administrator's office.

Be Yourself

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration that you have for everyone else. Treat the person as an individual, not as a disability. Find a topic of small talk the way you would with anyone. Use a normal voice when extending a verbal welcome. Do not raise your voice unless requested. As in any new situation, everyone will be more comfortable if you relax.

Providing Assistance

Do not automatically give assistance. Ask first if the person wants help. Follow the person's cues and ask if you are not sure. Assistance with doors, as long as you are clear of the path, is usually appreciated. If your offer of assistance is accepted, listen or ask for instructions. Don't be offended if someone refuses your offer. It is his or her choice to be as independent as possible.

Assisting Persons Who Use a Wheelchair

A person in a wheelchair is a "wheelchair user" or "uses a wheelchair." When having an extended conversation with someone in a wheelchair or scooter, try sitting or crouching down to his or her approximate height. Never touch or lean on a person's wheelchair unless you have permission – it is that person's private space. Give a push only when asked. Enable people who use crutches, canes, walkers, or wheelchairs to keep their mobility aids within reach, unless requested otherwise. Be aware of what is and is not accessible to people who use mobility aids such as wheelchairs and walkers.

People who use wheelchairs may have a variety of different disabilities. Some have use of their arms and some don't. When you meet someone, extend your hand to shake if that is what you normally do. A person who cannot shake your hand will let you know.

Interacting With People With Communication Disabilities

A person is considered to have a communication disability when that person's ability to receive, send, or process information is reduced. Talk directly to the person, not to an aide or interpreter. It is important to make eye contact. Listen patiently and carefully. If you don't understand someone, ask the person to repeat. Ask the person to say something a different way if you are still not sure what he or she is saying. If the person doesn't understand you when you speak, try again. Sometimes it takes repeated attempts at listening or speaking for communication to be successful. Go to a quiet room if necessary. Let the person know your communication with him or her is worthwhile to you. When appropriate, offer to make public information available in alternative formats such as Braille, audio tape, or large print.

If you need to get the attention of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, place yourself in the person's line of sight then touch him or her lightly on the shoulder or arm; or "wave" your hand in front of him or her.

If the deaf or hard of hearing person can read lips, position yourself so they can clearly see your lips and are conversing with you in a well lit area. Talk at your normal pace and enunciate your words clearly. Unless requested, it is not necessary for you to increase your speaking volume.

Interaction with People with Cognitive or Developmental Disabilities

Assume the life experiences of adults who have cognitive or developmental disabilities are similar to other adults and speak with them from that perspective. Assume people with cognitive disabilities are legally competent. They can often sign documents, vote, consent to medical care and sign contracts. Address questions, comments, or concerns directly to the individual, not to a companion.

Environments

Be sensitive about the setting. A noisy or dark environment or one with many people talking at the same time may make it difficult for people with vision, speech, hearing, or some other hidden disabilities to fully participate in a conversation. Be aware of clear paths of travel for people who are blind or use wheelchairs or other mobility aids. Be aware that a person with chemical sensitivity may have a reaction to smoke, perfume, or other toxins in the environment.

Touching

You may gently touch people with disabilities to get their attention. Touch them when appropriate, such as when shaking hands in greeting or if assistance is requested. If you meet people with AIDS, shake their hands as you would anyone else's. You can't get AIDS by touching. Do not touch someone's cane, wheelchair, or other assistive device. It is a part of that person's personal space. If you are interested in a demonstration of someone's electronic aid, ask the person to demonstrate. Do not try to use such equipment unless you are invited to do so. Guide dogs and other service animals are working animals. Do not pet or touch them without specific permission.

Labels Not to Use	Instead, Use...
Handicapped or disabled	People with disabilities
Hearing Impaired	Deaf or Hard of Hearing
Mentally retarded	Person with mental retardation
He is learning disabled	He has a learning disability
She's crippled	She has a physical disability
He's confined to a wheelchair	He uses a wheelchair
Normal children	Children without disabilities; children not disabled
Birth defect	Congenital disability
Handicapped parking	Accessible parking

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