

Focus on Ability

Interacting with people with disabilities



**“It’s the differences among us
that empower us as one”**



Presented by
NASA Johnson Space Center
Office of Equal Opportunity and Diversity



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IT'S THE LAW: Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination in all employment practices, including hiring, firing, job application procedures, job assignments, training, promotions, wages, benefits, leave, and all other employment-related activities.

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- ❑ **The ADA requires that employers with 15 or more employees make reasonable accommodations in the workplace for employees with disabilities.**
- ❑ **Accommodations are to be made on a case-by-case basis and may not be required when costs create an undue hardship.**
- ❑ **Under ADA, only AFTER a conditional offer of employment has been made to an applicant can any questions about disability be asked.**

Even then, the only reason that an employer has for asking any disability-related question is to determine if reasonable accommodations are necessary.

- ❑ **Upon employment, if you have a disability and require special accommodation, it is your responsibility to make your needs known to your supervisor so that the accommodation can be provided.**



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- ❑ **Interacting effectively with people with disabilities may mean looking beyond our own perceptions—focusing on “abilities” rather than “disabilities.”**
- ❑ **What can you do to make interactions with people with disabilities a positive experience for both of you?**

Here’s some tips . . .

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Disability Etiquette

❑ The Basics

- ❑ **Ask before you help** – Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it.
- ❑ **Be sensitive about physical contact** – Respect personal space (and equipment is part of that space).
- ❑ **Think before you speak** – Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to a companion.
- ❑ **Don't make assumptions** – People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do.
- ❑ **Respond graciously to requests**– Make them feel comfortable requesting accommodation

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- ❑ **People who use wheelchairs or have mobility impairments**
 - ❑ **Wheelchair users are people, not equipment. Don't lean on it or ask a person to hold your belongings.**
 - ❑ **Don't push or touch a person's wheelchair— It's part of his/her personal space.**
 - ❑ **People who use canes or crutches need their arms for balance, so don't grab them.**



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- ❑ **People who are blind or visually impaired**
 - ❑ **Identify yourself before making physical contact.**
 - ❑ **People who are blind need their arms for balance, so offer your arm—don't take his or her's—if he/she needs to be guided.**
 - ❑ **If the person has a guide dog, walk on the side opposite the dog. Verbally note obstacles or hazards.**
 - ❑ **If giving directions, give specific non-visual information.**
 - ❑ **Don't touch the person's cane or guide dog—the cane is part of the person's individual space and the dog is working and needs to concentrate.**



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- ❑ **People who are deaf or hard of hearing**
 - ❑ **Although a sign-language interpreter is sometimes needed for complex information, writing back & forth in casual interaction is usually okay.**
 - ❑ **If an interpreter is present, look directly at the person who is deaf and talk directly to him/her.**
 - ❑ **Before speaking to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, make sure that you get his/her attention.**
 - ❑ **Speak clearly, but don't shout.**
 - ❑ **Don't obscure your face, since many people who are deaf or hard of hearing read lips to help them understand.**



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❑ Hidden Disabilities

- ❑ **Not all disabilities are apparent, yet the disabilities are real.**
- ❑ **An apparently healthy person may have an unseen condition such as:**
 - ❑ **Learning disability**
 - ❑ **Medical condition such as cancer or heart problems**
 - ❑ **Side effects of medication**
- ❑ **Respect the person's needs and requests whenever possible.**

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❑ Terminology Tips

- ❑ **Put the person first—Say “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person.”**
- ❑ **Avoid outdated terms like “handicapped” or “crippled.”**
- ❑ **Say “wheelchair user” rather than “confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair bound.”**
- ❑ **Avoid negative, disempowering words like “victim” or “sufferer.”**
- ❑ **It’s okay to use expressions like “it was good to see you” when talking with persons who are blind—they use those too.**
- ❑ **In general, it is safest to refer to people who have hearing loss but communicate in spoken language as “hard of hearing” and to people with profound hearing losses as “deaf.”**

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□ Remember,

"People with disabilities are individuals with families, jobs, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and problems and joys. While the disability is an integral part of who they are, it alone does not define them. Don't make them into disability heroes or victims. Treat them as individuals."

United Spinal Association