

Welcoming people with disabilities

Understanding disabilities

There are many kinds of disabilities. They can be visible, hidden, permanent, or occur only at certain times.

Types of disabilities:

- vision
- hearing
- physical
- intellectual
- developmental
- learning
- mental health
- speech or language
- deaf-blind.

Disabilities vary. Being hard of hearing is different from being Deaf. Having low vision is different from being legally blind. Some people are born with a disability. For others, the disability happens because of an illness or an accident.

Tips on welcoming people with disabilities:

Here are some **general tips** to help you welcome people with disabilities.

- Don't make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has.
- Some disabilities are not visible. Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- If you're not sure what to do, ask, "Can I help?"
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission-don't just jump in. People with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- If you can't understand what's being said, don't pretend. Just politely ask again.
- Find a good way to communicate. A good start is to listen carefully.
- Look at the person, but don't stare. Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their interpreter or someone who is with them.
- Speak normally and clearly using plain language and short sentences.
- Don't touch or address service animals — they are working and have to pay attention at all times. Service or guide dogs are permitted in any area including pool areas, unless prohibited by law such as a kitchen.
- Ask permission before touching a wheelchair or a piece of equipment.
- Never touch the person without asking permission, unless it's an emergency.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.
- Use *disability* or *disabled*, not *handicap* or *handicapped*.

- Remember to put people first. It is proper to say *person with a disability*, rather than *disabled person*.

Here are some extra tips on welcoming people with **vision disabilities**:

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear.
- Don't just assume the person can't see you.
- Don't leave the person in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye.

Here are some extra tips on welcoming people who are **Deaf or hard of hearing**:

- Attract the person's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where the person can see your face.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- Don't shout.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in a quiet area. Background noise can be distracting.

Here are some extra tips on welcoming people who have **physical disabilities**:

- People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Be patient. People will identify their needs to you.
- Provide the person information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).
- Remove obstacles and rearrange furniture to give them clear passage.

Here are some extra tips on welcoming people who have an **intellectual or developmental disability**:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.

Above all treat people with disabilities with patience, understanding and courtesy.

After all, isn't that how you like to be treated?