

# Disability Etiquette Protocols

– from Commonwealth of Massachusetts online training 2012

## Guide or service animals:

### Things to keep in mind...

Service and guide dogs are working animals. It's their responsibility to keep their owner safe. Before petting any dog, courtesy would dictate that you ask permission. In the case of service and guide dogs, particularly those in harness, it is a matter of safety for the individual that they are assisting.

Guide dogs are taught "intelligent disobedience." For example, if Kathy gives Debbie a command to go forward, but Debbie recognizes that it would be dangerous, Debbie would "disobey" this command and Kathy would then know not to proceed.

Here are some additional things to keep in mind with regards to guide or service animals:

1. **People with service animals are allowed to go everywhere that people without service animals go.**
2. **People with service animals are not required to carry any special proofs or IDs pertaining to the service animal.** However, they can be asked what service the animal provides.
3. **A service animal must be under control at all times.** If not, the person with the service animal can be required to remove the animal from the site.
4. **You are not required to walk or otherwise care for the animal.**

If issues arise from the presence of a service animal, they should be addressed to a supervisor.

## Learning Disabilities Interaction Tips

1. **Speak directly to the person** using easy, clear, concrete, and task-specific language in a normal speaking voice.
2. **Be patient and flexible.** You may need to repeat information more than once or write down directions.
3. If the area is loud and has many distractions, **consider moving to a quieter area.**

## Mental Health Disabilities Interaction Tips

1. **Take the necessary time** to listen to the person's concerns. Be calm and respectful. Be empathetic and flexible.
2. **Consider moving the conversation**; maybe to a less crowded and quieter place.
3. If the person is with a companion, **ask the person if they would like their companion to come along**.
4. **Some people may not use eye contact** or may be easily distracted. Do not interpret this as rudeness.
5. Although rare, if the conversation becomes confrontational, do not escalate, **seek a supervisor for assistance**.

## Vision Impairment Interaction Tips

1. **It is O.K. to use words like, "look," "see," or "watch"** when speaking with someone who has a vision impairment. People with any degree of vision loss are considered to have a vision impairment. There is often no way for a casual observer to determine if someone has a vision impairment. People with vision impairments may or may not wear glasses, have guide dogs, or use canes.
2. When encountering a person using a guide dog or cane, **announce your presence and identify yourself**, so they know where and who you are. Speak directly to the individual and do not yell.
3. **Offer assistance**. If the offer is declined, **do not insist**.
4. If they want assistance in reaching their destination, **let them take your arm or shoulder for guidance**. While walking, **advise them** of any upcoming obstacles or changes in level.
5. When giving directions, **give specific non-visual information**.
5. **Announce when you are leaving**.

Just as people's hearing losses vary widely, so does the manner in which they best communicate. To best achieve effective communication, it's imperative to ask a person how they prefer to communicate. Some additional tips are:

1. In initial conversations, **use simple sentences**.
2. **Be prepared with pen and paper**. (Be mindful that some individuals who are deaf from birth were never taught written English.)
3. If the individual is using an interpreter **speak directly to the person, not to the interpreter**.
4. **Do not assume that people can read your lips** (or speech read).
5. If a person does speech read, make sure that you **face them** and that your mouth is not obstructed when you speak.
6. **Make sure that the communication is understood** on both sides; repeat your understanding of the discussion for verification.
7. **Never pretend that you understand what is being said when you do not**. If the communication is technical, or you are having trouble communicating, consider putting the conversation on hold and getting an interpreter.
8. **Be patient**. Some individuals may need you to repeat yourself more than once or may need to speak to you in a quieter space without background noise.

## Speech Impairment Tips

1. **Give the person your full attention** and attempt to understand what they are saying.
2. **Do not interrupt** the person, attempt to finish sentences, or ask the person they are with to tell you what they said.
3. **Speak in a regular tone of voice**. Do not assume that a person cannot understand what **you** are saying because their speech is impaired.
4. **Ask follow up questions and summarize your understanding** of the conversation for verification.
5. If someone brings a communication device, take the necessary time to **interact with the individual who is using the device**. Such devices can be very simple boards, with words or pictures painted

on them, all the way up to sophisticated computer applications that replicate detailed human speech. If you haven't interacted with anyone using a device like this before, ask how best to do so.

6. If you continue to have difficulty understanding what is being said, **ask the person if they can state it in a different way**. If that does not work, **seek another staff member to help**.

## **Mobility Impairment Tips**

1. Always ask a person if they need assistance and how you can be of help.
2. **Never lean on a person's wheelchair.**
3. When giving directions to a person using a wheelchair, consider things such as stairs, curbs, and steep hills.
4. When giving directions to a person using crutches or a cane, ask if they would prefer the shortest route (which may include stairs) or a route that uses an elevator (but may be further away.)
5. When accompanying a person who uses a wheelchair, be prepared to point out wheelchair seating, or to remove a chair.