



# Disability Etiquette

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DEI Best Practices Conference

March 1, 2018



# Learning Objectives

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After completing this training, participants will be able to:

- Use person-first language
- Describe and demonstrate language do's and don'ts
- Employee disability etiquette in a variety of scenarios



# Disability Etiquette

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# Embracing Disability In the Workplace



[Play Video](#)



# What is Disability Etiquette?

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What is etiquette?

- ❑ Politeness
- ❑ Good manners
- ❑ Shows respect and understanding



Why disability etiquette?

- ❑ High unemployment rates; not many people with disabilities are working
- ❑ Little experience with colleagues with disabilities in the workplace
- ❑ May feel a little uncomfortable; it's not familiar

# Let's Talk About Language

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Get to know the person first. Human nature is to notice differences, but disability does not define a person. It is just part of who they are.

## Person-First

The person comes before the disability in the description.

- Person who uses a wheelchair
- Person with multiple sclerosis

## Identity-First

The disability comes before the person in the description.

- Some adults with autism prefer to say that they are “autistic” (vs. saying they “have autism”).
- Deaf adults versus (vs. adults who are Deaf).

**When in doubt, use Person-First Language!**

# Language Do's and Dont's

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"I'll see you  
later"

...even when the  
person you are  
speaking with is  
blind



"suffer" or  
"victim"

"confined to a  
wheelchair" or  
"wheelchair  
bound"

# Avoid the “R-Word”

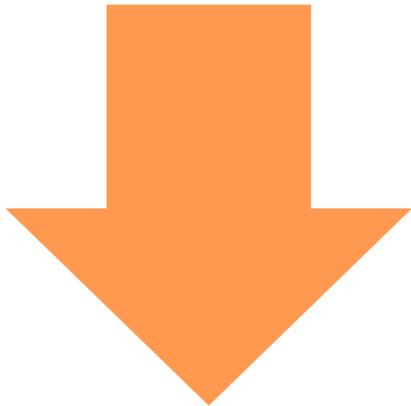
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“Intellectual  
Disability”

*Spread the word to  
end the word*

[Play Video](#)



“Mental  
Retardation”

The “R-Word” is considered offensive



What do you do?  
What do you say?

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Case Studies

# Scenario # 1

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You are standing behind someone in a cafeteria buffet line that uses crutches to walk. You are wondering whether she might need help getting food from the buffet and carrying it to her table.

What do you do? What do you say?

## Scenario # 2

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You are conducting a resume development workshop. A customer asks you a question that shows that he totally missed one of the major points you just covered. Without thinking, another customer jokingly says, “What’s the matter, are you deaf?” He turns to her and says, “As a matter of fact, yes. I have a hearing loss.”

What do you do? What do you say?

## Scenario # 3

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Five people are on a conference call and you're leading the call. One person, John, speaks softly and slurs some words as a result of a stroke, making it difficult to understand him on the phone. John has just shared a fairly lengthy proposal but you weren't able to understand all of what he said. As the leader of the call, you have to take control of the situation. If you didn't catch all of it, probably others haven't heard it either.

What do you do? What do you say?

## Scenario # 4

You and your new colleague, Ben, are sitting together participating in a state wide conference call. After Ben offers a suggestion, the boss, Scott, responds with, “Are you crazy?” Ben doesn’t respond – leading to an uncomfortable, awkward silence. You can see that Ben feels hurt. Immediately following the meeting, you make a point of checking in with Ben and comment on how rude it was of Scott to make that comment. Ben looks at you appreciatively and then discloses that he has bipolar disorder. He shares how disappointed he feels to be called ‘crazy’ at work. Even though he hadn't disclosed to Scott, he never thought this stigma would be perpetuated by someone he looked up to and who had helped to hire him.

What do you do? What do you say?

## Scenario # 5

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You are visually impaired and use a white cane for assistance. You are almost at work and are running late for a meeting when a stranger grabs your arm and “helps” you across a street you had no intention of crossing and that is in the opposite direction of your office. You now find yourself disoriented and frazzled.

What do you do? What do you say?

# Disability etiquette is about how a person **HANDLES** diverse situations

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**H** - Just say "**HELLO!**"

**A** - If you're not sure what to say or do, **ASK**.

**N** - It's OK to accept **NO** for an answer.

**D** - Every person & every disability is **DIFFERENT**.

**L** - Treat Adults **LIKE** Adults.

**E** - The important thing is to **ENGAGE**.

**S** - People with disabilities are **STRONG!**

# Questions & Discussion

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Work Without Limits is an initiative of the University of Massachusetts Medical School. For more information:  
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**WorkWithoutLimits**  
— PUTTING ABILITIES TO WORK —