

DMEQ QUICK GUIDE

Disability Etiquette in the Workplace

Disability management should include etiquette strategies that foster inclusion of people with disabilities in employment settings. For leaders wanting to integrate people with disabilities successfully into their organizations, the following etiquette strategies may be useful.

Encouraged Actions

- ✓ Be mindful; think before you speak, and show that you are actively inclusive in your actions.
- ✓ Put the person first: say “individual with a disability” instead of “disabled person.”
- ✓ If someone asks you to assist and you are unsure of what to do, feel free to seek clarification.
- ✓ Ask first before opening doors or providing any other type of assistance.
- ✓ Speak directly to an individual with a disability, not to the interpreter or attendant.
- ✓ Respect an individual’s privacy regarding his/her disability.
- ✓ Respect an individual’s personal space.
- ✓ Try to sit at the same level when talking to an individual in a wheelchair or scooter. If this cannot be done, stand at a slight distance so that he/she does not have to strain his/her neck.
- ✓ When introducing an individual who is visually impaired or blind to a group of people, try to do so in an organized manner by stating the person’s name as well as their role.
- ✓ When walking with an individual who uses a cane or service animal, be sure to walk on the opposite side of the cane or animal.
- ✓ When guiding an individual who is blind or has vision impairment, be sure to describe the setting and note any obstacles. For example, “we are approaching a flight of stairs going up one floor.”
- ✓ If providing directions to an individual who is blind or has a vision impairment, be sure to give non-visual cues, such as “go to the end of the aisle and make a left.”
- ✓ When communicating with an individual who is deaf or has hearing impairment, follow the person’s cues to find out if he/she prefers sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking. In addition, make sure to get his/her attention first before attempting to communicate.

Actions to Avoid

- ✗ Do not ask personal questions about a person’s disability.
- ✗ Do not make individuals into disability heroes or victims; treat everyone as individuals first.
- ✗ Adjusting to a disability requires adapting to a lifestyle, not courage.
- ✗ Do not use outdated and negative terms such as “handicapped,” “crippled,” “retarded,” “physically challenged,” “differently abled,” “victim” or “sufferer.”
- ✗ Do not assume that an individual with a disability needs assistance.
- ✗ Do not assume that everyone with a certain type of disability has the same limitations.
- ✗ Do not decide for individuals with disabilities regarding whether they can participate in workplace activities due to limitations. Excluding individuals from equal work and opportunities is discriminatory by presuming that they cannot perform the task or participate.
- ✗ Do not touch a person’s wheelchair, scooter, cane, or service animal without asking.

You may find additional disability etiquette recommendations on [Jobs Accommodation Network](#) website. If you have any questions, please contact the servicing HQ or Regional Disability and Diversity Program Manager.