



12 Tips for Interacting with People with Disabilities

1. Relax! You are communicating with a person, not a “disability.”
2. Don’t be afraid to make a mistake.
3. Don’t assume someone can or cannot do something; when in doubt, ask.
4. Speak directly to the person with the disability; if a companion is present, don’t speak to the person through the companion.
5. Treat adults as adults. Address people with disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to everyone else present.
6. Never patronize someone by patting him or her on the head or shoulders.
7. Never pet, talk to, feed, or otherwise distract a service animal unless the owner has given you permission.
8. If you offer assistance and the person declines, respect his or her preference.
9. If your offer is accepted, ask how you can help, and then follow the instructions.
10. Expect diversity of preferences and opinions.
11. Do not ask individuals about their disability or diagnosis; it is very personal information that is theirs to share if and when they choose.
12. Be respectful. Apply the platinum rule (treat people the way they want to be treated).