



Lead by Example	Why this is Important
Smile and say hello	When meeting or walking by a person with a disability, instead of worrying about where to look or what to do, smile and say hello. Like you, people with disabilities appreciate polite, friendly, and respectful recognition.
Speak directly to the person	Talking around a person or referring to someone in third person language is inconsiderate. As a common courtesy, look and speak directly to people of all abilities. This is especially helpful when interacting with someone who has a hearing impairment as it helps identify your facial expressions and makes it easier to lip read. This holds true when communicating with people who may have other health or age-related conditions.
Identify yourself	Introduce yourself by name to provide a useful frame of reference. This is particularly helpful for someone with vision impairments or memory problems. It is best not to assume that people know your name, the sound of your voice, or their relation to you, particularly when you are interacting in an uncommon setting.
Communicate at eye level	Whenever possible, position yourself at eye level when communicating with someone who uses a wheelchair or is shorter than you. This minimizes talking down or over someone and sets a more comfortable tone in conversations.
Respect personal space	Consider a wheelchair or other adaptive equipment for mobility or communication as a natural extension of a person. Refrain from leaning on or touching the equipment without permission. This also applies to service animals. Acknowledge that all of these are "personal property." Likewise, when helping someone with a backpack, purse, or wallet, always ask permission before you proceed to open.
Offer assistance, Wait to proceed	There may be instances when a specific type of support is more helpful than others. For example, a person may have sensitivities on a particular limb or require help in a certain way. Rather than assume, first offer assistance then wait to proceed based on the person's response. This will minimize accidentally harming someone or breaking equipment. Don't be offended if help is not needed.
Listen patiently and honestly	Refrain from interrupting, finishing sentences, or talking over a person, especially if they have speech, memory, or other communication difficulties. Likewise, do not pretend to understand. If needed, respectfully ask to repeat information. Listening patiently and being honest is helpful for all parties.
Use "person first" language	Use neutral language that refers to the person first. Replace the word victim or suffered with survivor or living with. For example, my cousin lives with a spinal cord injury or my father is a Stroke survivor. This helps eliminate negative connotations and reinforces empowerment and independence. People with disabilities share the same hopes and dreams as everyone else. They work, go to school, play, have families, pay taxes, and lead fulfilling and productive lives.