

Accessible Computing Seminar

Lecture #5 –Disability Etiquette

Ask Before You Help

- Just because someone has a disability, don't assume she needs help.
- If the setting is accessible, people with disabilities can usually get around fine.
- Adults with disabilities want to be treated as independent people.
- Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it.
- A person with a disability will oftentimes communicate when she needs help.
- And if she does want help, ask how before you act.

Speak Directly To A Person With A Disability...



...Not To His Companion Or Sign Language Interpreter



Keep Accessible Paths Of Travel Clear



Think Before You Speak

- Making small talk with a person who has a disability is great; just talk to him as you would with anyone else.
- Respect his privacy. If you ask about his disability, he may feel like you are treating him as a disability, not as a human being.
- However, many people with disabilities are comfortable with questions about their disability after getting to know someone.
- A simple “I don’t feel comfortable sharing that” by the person with a disability can set the tone if it is not something that he/she is willing to share.

Keep accessible paths of travel clear



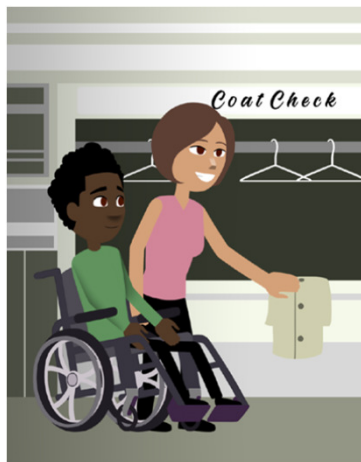
Don't Ask A Person Using A Wheelchair To Hold Things For You



Be Sensitive About Physical Contact

- Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance
- Grabbing them, even if your intention is to assist, could knock them off balance.
- Avoid patting a person on the head or touching his wheelchair, scooter or cane.
- People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.

Respect Her Personal Space



People Who Are Blind

- PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND know how to orient themselves and get around on the street.
- They are competent to travel unassisted, though they may use a cane or a guide dog.
- A person may have a visual disability that is not obvious.
- Be prepared to offer assistance—for example in reading—when asked.

People Who Are Blind

- Identify yourself before you make physical contact with a person who is blind.
- Tell him your name and your role if it's appropriate, such as security guard, usher, case worker, receptionist or fellow student.
- Be sure to introduce him to others who are in the group, so that he's not excluded.
- If a new customer or employee is blind or has low vision, offer him a tour of your facility.

People Who Are Blind

- If you have changed your facility (i.e., rearranged the furniture) notify your customers who are blind of the changes.
- People who are blind may need their arms for balance, so offer your arm— don't take his—if he needs to be guided. (It is however appropriate to guide a blind person's hand to a banister or the back of a chair to help direct him to a stairway or a seat.)
- If the person has a guide dog, walk on the side opposite the dog.
- As you are walking, describe the setting, noting any obstacles, such as stairs ('up' or 'down') or a big crack in the sidewalk.

If A Person Who Is Blind Needs To Be Guided ...



...Offer Your Arm - Don't Take His



Be Specific When Giving Directions...



...To People Who Are Blind Or Have Low Vision



People Who Are Blind

- Other hazards include: revolving doors, half-opened filing cabinets or doors, and objects protruding from the wall at head level such as hanging plants or lamps.
- If you are going to give a warning, be specific. Hollering "Look out!" does not tell the person if he should stop, run, duck or jump.

People Who Are Blind

- If you are giving directions, give specific, non-visual information.
- Rather than say, “Go to your right when you reach the office supplies,” which assumes the person knows where the office supplies are, say, “Walk forward to the end of this aisle and make a full right.”
- If you need to leave a person who is blind, inform him you are leaving and ask if he needs anything before you leave.

People Who Are Blind

- Don't touch the person's cane or guide dog. The dog is working and needs to concentrate.
- The cane is part of the individual's personal space. If the person puts the cane down, don't move it. Let him know if it's in the way.
- Offer to read written information—such as the menu, merchandise labels or bank statements—to customers who are blind.
- Count out change so that they know which bills are which.
- If you serve food to a person who is blind, let him know where it is on the plate according to a clock orientation (12 o'clock is furthest from them, 6 o'clock is nearest).

People With Low Vision

- A person who has low vision may need written material in large print.
- A clear font with appropriate spacing is just as important as the type size.
- Labels and signs should be clearly lettered in contrasting colors.
- It is easiest for most people with low vision to read bold white letters on black background.
- Avoid using all uppercase letters because it is more difficult for people with low vision to distinguish the end of a sentence.

People With Low Vision

- Good lighting is important, but it shouldn't be too bright. In fact, very shiny paper or walls can produce a glare that disturbs people's eyes.
- Keep walkways clear of obstructions.
- If people with low vision regularly use your facility as customers or employees, inform them about any physical changes, such as rearranged furniture, equipment or other items that have been moved.

People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- American sign language is an entirely different language from English, with a syntax all its own. Lip reading is difficult for people who are Deaf if their first language is ASL because the majority of sounds in English are formed inside the mouth, and it's hard to speech read a second language.
- People who have a hearing loss, however, communicate in English. They use some hearing, but may rely on amplification and/or seeing the speaker's lips to communicate effectively.

People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- There is a range of communication preferences and styles among people with hearing loss that cannot be explained in this brief space.
- It is helpful to note that the majority of people who incurred a hearing loss as adults do not communicate with sign language, do use English, and may be candidates for writing and assistive listening devices to help improve communication.
- People with cochlear implants, like other people with hearing loss, will usually inform you what works best for them.

People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- When the exchange of information is complex (e.g., during a job interview or doctor's visit or when reporting a crime) the most effective way to communicate with a native signer is through a qualified sign language interpreter.
- For a simple interaction (e.g., ordering in a restaurant or registering for a hotel room) writing back and forth is usually OK.
- Follow the person's cues to find out if she prefers sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking.
- If you have trouble understanding the speech of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, let her know.
- When using a sign language interpreter, look directly at the person who is deaf, and maintain eye contact to be polite.

People Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Talk directly to the person ('What would you like?'), rather than to the interpreter ('Ask her what she'd like.').
- People who are deaf need to be included in the decision-making process for issues that affect them; don't decide for them.
- Before speaking to a person who is deaf or has a loss of hearing, make sure that you get her attention.
- Depending on the situation, you can extend your arm and wave your hand, tap her on the shoulder or flicker the lights.
- Rephrase, rather than repeat, sentences that the person does not understand.

When An Exchange Of Information Is Complex, The Most Effective Way To Communicate With...



...A Person Who Is Deaf Is Through A Qualified Sign Language Interpreter



Do Not Obscure Your Face When Communicating With A Person Who Has A Hearing Loss



Do Not Obscure Your Face When Communicating With A Person Who Has A Hearing Loss



If You Have Trouble Understanding A Person With...



...A Speech Disability Ask Him To Repeat



Try To Avoid Using Sprays Or Other Fumy Products When Customers Are In Your Store



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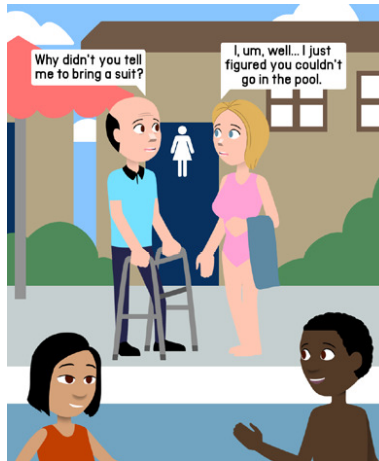
Always Ask Before You Help



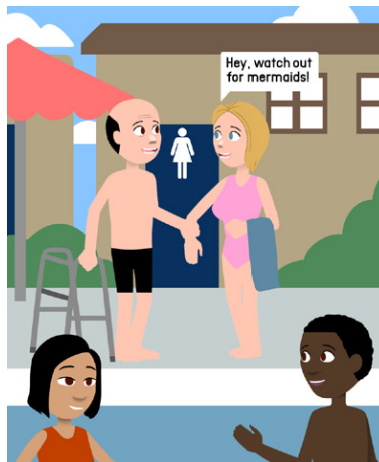
Always Ask Before You Help



Don't Make Decisions For People With Disabilities...



... About What They Can Or Can't Do.



Don't Make Assumptions

- People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do.
- Don't make decisions for them about participating in any activity.
- Depending on the situation, it could be a violation of the ADA to exclude people because of a presumption about their limitations.

Respond Graciously To Requests

- When people who have disabilities ask for an accommodation at your business, it is not a complaint.
- It shows they feel comfortable enough in your establishment to ask for what they need.
- And if they get a positive response, they will probably come back again and tell their friends about the good service they received.

Talking To Someone With Autism

Let's start with definitions

- Be nice
- Be patient
- Listen carefully
- Pay attention
- Instruct us – but nicely
- The bottom line

Let's Start With Definitions

- **Aspie** - Someone who has [Asperger's syndrome](#), which is on the autism spectrum.
- **Autism** - [a neurological disorder](#) characterized by repetitive behavior, difficulties communicating, and problems establishing and maintaining relationships.
- **Autism awareness** - A movement about spreading awareness and acceptance of people on the autism spectrum.
- **Neurotypical** - A person who doesn't display atypical thought patterns or behaviors.
- **Stimming** - Self-soothing, repetitive body movements which autistic people do in response to over-stimulation or emotional stress. Common '[stims](#)' are rocking back-and-forth motions, hand flapping, and arm and leg rubbing.

Be nice

- Even if us Aspie's make you a little bit uncomfortable, a little kindness can go a long way! We might behave in ways that baffle you, but trust me, you behave in ways that baffle us, too.
- When people try to assume our mental capacity, it only serves to demonstrate their doubt of our condition. This causes resentment and we feel annoyed because it invalidates us — e.g. “Why can't you do this now when you could do it yesterday?”

Be nice

- It forces our defense of “I'm autistic.”
 - The differences between autistic and neurotypical minds are huge.
 - Avoid questioning our capability, and instead focus on optimism and reassurance.
 - A compliment or encouraging comment can set up the framework for a lasting friendship.

Be patient

- We can't always tell you how we feel, because we don't always have words to express our feelings. If you're patient with us, you'll be able to tell what we need more quickly, because you won't be so panicked, anxious, or annoyed about trying to figure out what the problem is.

Be patient

- Patience comes when you realize that the only way to tell how we're feeling is to listen to us very carefully, and watch us for unusual movements at stressful moments. Don't allow yourself to feel anxious or get upset when we're experiencing symptoms.
- It's better for all parties if you're patient with our communication skills — or lack thereof. That brings me to the next bit ...

Listen carefully

- We process communication solely on word processing and not subtle facial cues, so we might semantically misunderstand the meaning of the words you use, especially homophones. We also get confused by inflection.
- For example, we have difficulty with sarcasm. My mom would always say “Thank you,” when we didn't do what she asked. So the one time I actually did clean my room, she responded with “Thanks!” and I replied, “But I cleaned it!”

Listen carefully

- This is where your listening helps both of us. Because you'll probably notice the misunderstanding before we do, please clarify what you're trying to say if our responses don't match what you mean. My mom did that, and I learned what sarcasm is and what “Thank you” means.
- We also might understand something differently because our emotional audio processing tends to get jumbled a little when we're trying to hear. We're not generally very good at polite conversation or small talk, so getting personal is okay with most of us. We enjoy connection just like everyone else.

Pay attention

- You might notice if we start stimming. We do this when we're experiencing an excess of emotion or sensory stimuli. It isn't always bad, and it isn't always good. It just is.
- Most people with autism have free floating physical anxiety even when we're happy, and stimming helps keep that under control. If you notice that we're moving around more than usual, go ahead and ask us if we need anything. Another helpful tip would be to turn down lights and any excess noise.

Instruct us – but nicely

- Are we offending you? Tell us. People with autism may experience avalanche-style misunderstandings. This hinders the formation and maintenance of lasting relationships, and can make for a very lonely life.
- For us, cultivating social skills is imperative to bridging the gap of misunderstandings. We aren't born with these skills, and some of us weren't properly educated on social etiquette or coping mechanisms. Not knowing that stuff instinctively makes forming connections more difficult.

Instruct us – but nicely

- When we're processing social cues, we might miss something and accidentally say something that comes off as stupid, mean, or offensive. Without those physical emotional cues to guide our response, we're left with just the words, sometimes making it an awkward experience for a neurotypical.

Instruct us – but nicely

- To demonstrate the difficulties this imposes, try closing your eyes the next time somebody is talking to you. It'll give you an idea of how much we're missing out on. It's believed that over half of all communication is nonverbal. If you're the neurotypical in the conversation, it's your responsibility to make sure you're clear in your meaning. Letting us know if we've offended you will get an apology from us a lot faster than making an offended face at us.

The bottom line

- Neurotypical people form conclusions based on subtle emotional cues given by who they're with. If you notice that the person you're talking to isn't doing that, you might be talking to someone with autism.
- Practicing these tips in the moment can help you be ready for complicated social situations when you interact with someone who has autism. Help them out and clarify yourself if they seem confused. By being mindful in the moment, you will feel more comfortable communicating with people on the spectrum.