

## SPEAKING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Remember first that I am a person; and second that I have a disability. If you need information about my disability, you may ask me directly. Ask me how you should refer to my disability.

Do not assume I always need assistance, and instead ask. Please follow my instructions to avoid possible injury to me or to yourself.

Do not assume because I have one disability, that I have may have other disabilities.

Maintain eye contact when you talk to me—even if I am using an interpreter.

If I have a speech impairment or use an augmentative communication system, please be patient and give me time to respond to you. Do not try to finish a sentence for me. If you don't understand something I've said, say so and ask me to repeat myself or to explain myself in another way.

Use a normal tone of voice—you don't need to speak loudly.

Do not lean on my wheelchair or distract a working animal. Do not *play* with my assistive equipment.

Don't hesitate to use everyday expressions. It's fine to say "See you later" to a person who is blind, or "Let's take a walk" to a person who uses a wheelchair.

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## DO USE AFFIRMATIVE PHRASES AND IMAGERY

- ... people with disabilities
- ... people who are blind;  
people who are visually impaired
- ... people who are deaf;  
who are hard of hearing; the Deaf
- ... people who have multiple sclerosis
- ... people with cerebral palsy
- ... people with developmental disabilities
- ... people who use a wheelchair;  
wheelchair user
- ... people without disabilities;  
non-disabled people
- ... unable to speak; non-verbal
- ... people with mental illness;  
psychiatric survivors
- ... successful; productive
- ... people with mobility impairments
- ... seizure



A picture of a person using a wheelchair at the computer helps emphasize ability.

## COMMUNICATING WITH AND ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with disabilities, like other groups, are actively seeking full civil rights. We want to be accepted in our communities as equals.

What you write and what you say can enhance the dignity of people with disabilities and promote positive attitudes about our abilities.



Let your descriptive words emphasize our worth and our abilities, not our disabilities.

Refer to the person first, rather than the disability. The phrase “*people with disabilities*” is preferred over “*the disabled*”.

## DO NOT USE NEGATIVE PHRASES AND IMAGERY

- ... the handicapped; the disabled
- ... the blind
- ... suffers a hearing impairment;  
hearing impaired
- ... afflicted by MS
- ... CP victim
- ... retarded; mentally defective; slow
- ... confined to a wheelchair;  
wheelchair bound
- ... normal person
- ... dumb; mute
- ... mental; crazy; psycho; nutcase;  
loony
- ... courageous
- ... cripple; lame
- ... fit

Watch out for stereotypes in graphics.

A cartoon of a person who is visually impaired being directed to the wrong door promotes negative attitudes.