



# Disability Sensitivity Handout



Disability Etiquette: Responding with **Compassion**

## ALL INDIVIDUALS ARE PURPOSEFULLY AND LOVINGLY CREATED BY GOD

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Psalm 139:13—16

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

Other verses to ponder: John 9:1-3, Matthew 9:36-37, 2 Cor.1:3-4, Luke 14: 21-23

## PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

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- Phrasing descriptions so that you talk about the person before his/her disability:
- Example: The child who is blind vs. the blind child
- Using people-first language puts the emphasis on the individual, not on the disability. It is a subtle difference, but means the world to the individuals!

## GREETING THE WHOLE FAMILY

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- When you greet a family, acknowledge everyone in the family
- It is very easy to only communicate with those who are easy to communicate to
- Make an extra effort—but one that appears genuine—to include the individual with disabilities
- If the individual with disabilities is in a wheelchair, consider pulling up a chair or getting down at his/her level

## WHEN INTERACTING WITH AN INDIVIDUAL IN A WHEELCHAIR

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- Give the individual space—the chair is part of their private space
- Don't lean over the chair
- Use body contact with the chair using the same guidelines you would if leaning on someone's arm
- Try to converse at eye level
- Pull up a chair to sit eye to eye or kneel down if possible
- Don't expect individual to look up to you at a sharp angle
- Do not assume that the individual needs you to push
- Give the individual the choice
- Encourage independence
- Know the "nuances" of power wheelchairs
- Don't rest your hands on the control side of the chair unless it is off
- Be careful not to accidentally send the chair forward



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- Be certain to set the wheelchair brake, and make sure the controller is turned off, before helping anyone in or out of the chair

### COMMUNICATION

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- Handle communication challenges honestly
- Avoid raising your voice
- Avoid asking others to speak for the child
- Avoid pretending that you understand when you do not
- If you don't understand, try asking questions to narrow the field. It's ok to say that you're not getting it and that you'll try again later

### SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKING WITH AN INDIVIDUAL ON THE AUTISTIC SPECTRUM

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- Keep in mind that there is a broad spectrum
- In general, these kids will have apprehensions about social interaction
- These kids tend to have sensory-sensitivities: loud noises, scratchy textures, bright or flashing lights...
- Find your friend's comfort level and stay with him there—this is not the time to force the child into uncomfortable situations
- Even if the child doesn't give you eye contact or smile, be positive and upbeat. Suggest new options without forcing decisions
- Children on the autistic spectrum tend to like routine and predictability—tell the child what is happening next, how long the current activity will probably last....

### SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENTS

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- Announce your arrival by name as you come into the room until the child is able to recognize your voice
- Do not shout at an individual with visual impairments
- Remember this individual is more like other people than different—relax and enjoy your time together



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## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH HEARING IMPAIRMENTS

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- Speak at normal pitch, but slowly
- Be sure that the light is accentuating your face, not glaring in the individual's face
- Face the individual when speaking
- Be sure you have the individual's attention before trying to communicate
- Use meaningful gestures

## RELAX AND TREAT THE INDIVIDUAL LIKE ANY ONE ELSE

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- Talk with a child, not through the parent whenever possible
- Talk with the adult, not through the spouse or caregiver whenever possible
- Talk with the individual, not at them
- Speak positively and directly to nonverbal children, using age-appropriate language and tone.
- Learn as much as you can about the ways your new friend communicates
- Kids with disabilities love to play just like other kids
- Adults with disabilities enjoy friendship and fun just like other adults
- Laugh, smile and enjoy the individual
- If you encounter an individual working with a guide dog or companion dog, be certain that you do not distract or try to play with the dog—the dog is working!
- Do not assume that every person with a disability is hard of hearing
- DO NOT SHOUT at the child unless necessary for safety reasons
- Tell the child what to do more than what not to do