



OAE

Office of
Accessible Education

Disability Etiquette Handout

Different Types of Language:

First-Person Language: The choice to recognizes and foreground a human as first and foremost a person versus their disability.

“A person with a disability”

Identity-First Language: By asserting that disability is integral to their identity, it honors the experience as a person with a disability alongside with other parts of their identity.

“I am a disabled person”

FYI

Although First Person Language is considered the default language style, remember to honor a person’s desired language. Furthermore, do not forget a person’s pronouns when referring to them.



Language Matters!

Best Practices

People with All Types of Disabilities:

- Introduce yourself and offer a handshake. Folks will often tell you if they are unable.
- Always ask before providing assistance - wait until the offer is accepted.
- Speak directly to the person and not their attendant, interpreter, family member, etc.
- Do not pet service animals without checking with the owner first.
- It is acceptable to ask questions if you are unsure how to proceed or what to do next.



Please see the back for more info



People with Mobility Disabilities:

- Do not push or touch a person's mobility device without their permission.
- Try to insure there is space in your room and/or office for someone with a mobility device.
- If you are speaking with a person who uses a mobility device for more than a few minutes, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.



People who are d/Deaf and/or Hard of Hearing:

- Make sure you get the person's attention before you begin to communicate. Ask before initiating contact.
- Use gestures and visual cues when appropriate.
- Let the person establish their preferred method of communication for your conversation, such as lip reading, sign language, note writing.
- Make eye contact when speaking.

People with Speech and Language Disorders:

- People with speech and language disorders may take longer to communicate with you – be patient and respectful.
- Be sensitive and do not interrupt or finish the person's sentence.
- Ask one question at a time, giving the person time to respond before moving on.
- If the person uses any assistive technology devices, make sure the devices are always within the person's reach.

People who are Vision-Impaired:

- Always introduce yourself and anyone else who is present for the conversation.
- If you are leaving the space, inform the person.
- When conversing in a group, identify the person who is speaking and to whom you are speaking.
- Offer to read information to a person when appropriate.
- If you are asked to offer guidance, offer your arm so the person can grasp your elbow. Do not take a person's arm and move them by the elbow.
- Never leave a person who is blind standing alone in the middle of a room. Escort the person to a seat or place their hand on "a point of reference" such as a wall or table.

People with Cognitive Disabilities:

- Keep communication simple, using short sentences and completing one topic before moving to the next topic.
- If possible, use pictures or other visual aids.
- Ask if the person has any questions or if there is anything they would like for you to clarify.

People with Mental Health or Behavioral Health Disabilities:

- If a person seems anxious or agitated, speak calmly and offer to repeat information.
- If a person seems nervous or confused, be willing to break things down step-by-step to help them understand the application procedure.
- Respect a person's choice of language or terminology. For example, if they ask you to refer to something as a "mental health condition" instead of a "mental illness", fulfill that request.
- If a person becomes upset or anxious, they may be confused or overwhelmed. Speak in a calm tone of voice, repeat necessary information, and reassure them.
- Know the local mental health crisis number to contact if needed.