

# Teaching Tolerance



Some people have disabilities that you can see right away. For example, some people use wheelchairs to help them get around. People with hearing problems might need to use a hearing aid. People who have trouble seeing might need to use a cane or a guide dog.

But some people have disabilities that you can't see right away. Some kids have learning disabilities like dyslexia. People with dyslexia often have a hard time with words and reading. Another disability you can't see is called Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or ADHD. Kids with ADHD may have trouble staying focused. Autism is another example of a disability that you can't see. Kids on the autism spectrum may have difficulty communicating and forming relationships with people.

Whether a kid has a disability you can see or not, remember that he or she is still just a kid! If you try talking to him, you'll probably discover that you have a lot more in common than you thought.

## **Disability Etiquette**

### **The Basics: Ask before you help**

Just because someone has a disability, don't assume he or 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 he or she needs help. And if he or she does want help, ask how before you act.

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## **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 or her wheelchair, scooter or cane. People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.

## **Think before you speak**

Always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to his or her companion, aide or sign language interpreter. Making small talk with a person who has a disability is great; just talk to him or her as you would with anyone else. Respect his or her privacy. If you ask about his or her disability, they may feel like you are treating them 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.

## **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 Americans with Disabilities Act 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.

