

10 Commandments of Sensitivity Training

Communicating with Individuals with Special Needs

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1. *Speak directly* rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present.
2. *Offer to shake hands when introduced.* People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands and offering the left hand is an acceptable greeting.
3. *Always identify yourself* and others who may be with you when meeting someone with a visual disability. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. *If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted.* Do not automatically assume that everyone needs assistance. Ask first, then listen to how you can help or ask for instructions. This one is key, especially for volunteers assisting individuals on and off of rides.
5. *Treat adults as adults.* Address people with disabilities by their first names only when extending that same familiarity to all others. Don't change your tone when speaking with an adult who has a developmental disability to sound as though you're speaking to a child. Never patronize people in wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.
6. *Do not lean against or hang on someone's wheelchair.* Bear in mind that people with disabilities treat their chairs as **extensions of their bodies**. And so do people with guide dogs and help dogs. Never distract a work animal from their job without the owner's permission.
7. *Listen attentively when talking with people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish.* Never pretend to understand; instead repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.
8. *Place yourself at eye level* when speaking with someone in a wheelchair.
9. *Tap a person who has a hearing disability* on the shoulder or wave your hand to get his or her attention. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. If a person is wearing a hearing aid, don't assume that they have the ability to discriminate your speaking voice. Never shout to a person. Just speak in a normal tone of voice.
10. *Relax. Don't be embarrassed* if you happen to use common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about this?" that seems to relate to a person's disability.