

Etiquette Quick Tips

Interacting with People with Visual Disabilities

People with Visual Disabilities

Visual disabilities, like hearing, fall along a continuum, from people who have no vision to people who have low vision and may be able to read large print.

- When offering help, identify yourself and let people know you are speaking to them by gently touching their arm. If you leave people's immediate area, tell them so they will not be talking to empty space.
- Speak directly facing the person. Your voice will orient the person. Your natural speaking tone is sufficient.
- When giving directions, be specific and describe obstacles in the path of travel. Clock clues may be helpful, such as "the desk is at 6 o'clock." Avoid pointing or using vague terms like "that way."
- Directions should be given for the way they are facing. For example, "the restroom stall is about 7 steps in front of you."
- When serving as a guide, ask, "Would you like to take my left (or right) arm?" The movements of your arm will let them know what to expect. Never grab or pull people.
- When leading a person through a narrow space such as an aisle, put your arm they are holding on to behind your back as a signal that they should walk directly behind you. Give verbal instructions as well, such as "we will be walking through a narrow row of chairs."
- When guiding a person through a doorway, let them know if the door opens in or out and to the right or to the left.



- Before going up or down steps, come to a complete stop. Tell people the direction of the stairs (up or down) and the approximate number of steps. If a handrail is available, tell them where it is.
- People do use escalators, but may prefer elevators. Ask which they prefer and if they need any assistance.
- When showing a person to a chair, place their hand on the back of the chair. They usually will not need any more help in being seated.
- If a person is using a service animal, the animal's attention should not be sidetracked. It is important not to pet or speak to the animal.
- When making change, count dollar bills separately and identify each bill amount as you hand them back to the person i.e. five fives, three ones. This is not needed with coins, as coins are easier to identify by touch.
- Offer to read information like menus, labels, and statements to the person if alone or with other people who are unable to read. When reading information, ask if they would like the full document read or would like to choose specific headings to have read.
- Offer Braille materials if available but do not be surprised if people would rather have the material read to them. Many people who are blind do not read Braille.
- When offering information in alternative formats (Braille, large print, disks, audio) ask people what format works best for them.
- When to help in signing a document; ask if they want you to show them the location of the signature line.



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