

Please circulate to others and file in your *Provider Manual* for future reference.

April 19, 2011

Welcoming Seniors and Persons with Disabilities

In order to continue to provide you with the latest information on Seniors and Persons with Disabilities (SPDs), we would like to provide you with a few tips on how to effectively communicate with the SPD population. We look forward to working with you and your staff to ensure we provide a smooth transition for our new SPD members.

10 Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities

(adapted from the award-winning training video)

- I. **Always speak directly to the person.** Do not speak through a companion or a service provider.
- II. **Offer to shake hands.** Always use the same good manners in interacting with a person who has a disability as you would with anyone else.
- III. **Identify yourself when speaking to a person who is blind.** Always announce when entering and/or leaving the room.
- IV. **Wait for a response and instructions when offering assistance.** Always wait until an individual accepts your offer, then listen to the instructions or ask for suggestions.
- V. **Treat adults as adults.** Always be courteous. Don't patronize or assume familiarity with someone you don't know well by touching.
- VI. **Do not hang or lean on a person's wheelchair.** A wheelchair is "assistive technology" or a "mobility aid" (not furniture). People use wheelchairs to increase their mobility and independence.
- VII. **Listen attentively and never pretend to understand.** If a person speaks in a manner that is difficult for you to understand, be patient. Listen carefully and wait for her/him to finish. Clarify what the person said—reflect what you heard and let the individual respond. Ask short questions that can be answered by a "yes" or "no" (or a nod or shake of the head). Note: Someone who does not speak is "nonverbal" or "without speech" — not "mute".
- VIII. **Speak to people at eye level.** When interacting for a period of time with someone using a wheelchair, sit down (or squat/bend down) so you can be at eye level. This helps the individual feel included as an equal in the conversation — and avoid neck strain!
- IX. **Wave your hand or tap a person who is deaf on the shoulder.** Once you have the person's attention, speak in your regular tone (don't shout). Keep objects away from your mouth so the person can read your lips.
- X. **RELAX!** The most important thing to remember when interacting with people with disabilities is to BE YOURSELF. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions that seem to relate to disability (e.g., walk, see). When you're not sure what to do or which language to use in a situation, simply be honest and open with the individual. When in doubt, just ask!

Disability Language & Etiquette

DEFINITION: Disability is a physical, psychological, cognitive, or sensory limitation that restricts one or more major life activities (e.g., self-care, communication, self-direction, learning, mobility, independent living, economic self-sufficiency, recreation).

GUIDELINES: The following tips reflect generally accepted protocol and language of the Independent Living/Disability Rights Movement. We encourage adherence to these guidelines even though you may know or observe some persons with disabilities who do not. Above all, remember that people with disabilities are just like anyone else.

DO NOT 🚫

DO 😊

Don't put disability first (disabled person, blind man, deaf woman)	Do use Person-First Language (person with a disability, man who is blind, woman who is deaf)
Don't label – i.e., don't turn people into objects (the disabled, the blind, the deaf, the asthmatic, the quad)	Do use Person-First Language (people with disabilities, person with asthma, person with quadriplegia)
Don't say "the H word" (handicap, handicapped)	Do say Disability or Accessible (wheelchair accessible parking, accessible parking, person with a disability, etc.)
Don't say "Impaired" or "Impediment"	Do say person withA physical disability A visual disability Low vision....A hearing / auditory disability (or person who is deaf or hard-of-hearing), etc.
Don't use euphemisms (mentally challenged, differently abled, etc.)	Do just use Disability
Don't say "wheelchair-bound: or "confined to a wheelchair" (wheelchairs are mobility devices; person is not in the chair all the time)	Do say "person who uses a wheelchair"
Don't use terms that imply pity (suffers from, afflicted with, birth defect, victim or, survivor, etc.)	Do say Disability May be "congenital" (since birth) or "acquired" (accident, illness)
Don't say "normal" or "healthy" to describe the absence of disability	Do say "individual without a disability"
Don't pity or admire	Do be supportive and respectful
Don't see disability as broken, unhealthy, or abnormal	Do recognize disability as part of life – and work to remove barriers
Don't assume the absence of disability if you don't see one	Do realize that many disabilities are not visible – "hidden disabilities"
Don't provide unsolicited "help"	Do offer assistance and ask for instruction on how best to do it
Don't be nervous	Do relax and be yourself