

## General Etiquette

People with disabilities are not conditions or diseases. They are individual human beings. For example, a person is not an *epileptic* but rather a person who has epilepsy. Using 'person-first' language is the most respectful.

To provide customer service and ensure fair and equal access, focus on what people with disabilities CAN DO, not what they can't do.

People with disabilities have the same needs and responsibilities you do. They want to:

- be independent
- have fun
- earn a living
- pay taxes
- have families

### Be Yourself

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration that you have for everyone else. Don't assume that "disability" is all that person can talk about or is interested in. Find a topic to talk about the way you would with anyone and relax, be yourself.

### Meeting Someone

Use your normal voice when extending a verbal welcome. It's okay to invite a person using a wheelchair to "go for a walk," or to ask a blind person if they "see what you mean."

There are many different types of disabilities. Some people have use of their arms and some don't. When you meet someone, extend your hand to shake if that is what you typically do. A person who cannot shake hands, will let you know, but s/he will appreciate being treated in the same way others you meet are treated. If

you are meeting a person who is blind, be sure to identify yourself.

Maintain eye contact. Everyone deserves the courtesy of being looked at. If the individual is using a wheelchair, try to put yourself at eye level. This avoids discomfort for both you and the person using the wheelchair.

Talk directly to the person, not to his friend, aide or interpreter. If you don't understand something, ask the individual to repeat. Sometimes it takes repeated attempts at listening or speaking for any communication to be successful. Let them know your communication with them is worthwhile to you.

### Helping - Ask First, Then Listen

If you see someone with a disability, don't be afraid to offer your assistance. Ask first - offer your assistance but don't insist. Not every person with a disability needs assistance.

## Serving People with Mobility Impairments

A person in a wheelchair is a "wheelchair user" they are not "confined to a wheelchair." Mobility devices (wheelchairs, crutches, walkers, etc.) are extensions of the individual using them. When speaking with someone using a wheelchair or scooter, try sitting or crouching down to achieve eye level and prevent strained necks. Never lean on a person's wheelchair unless you have permission –it's that person's private space. Give a push only when asked and let the user tell you how to push them.

## Serving People with Hearing Impairments

Signal before you speak to get the person's attention. A tap or a wave works fine. Face the person you are communicating with and keep hands and papers away from your face. Speak normally. Don't yell or exaggerate your words - it distorts your face making lip reading impossible. Use a normal tone and rhythm of speech. If you speak rapidly you may want to slow down somewhat.

Find the best way to communicate. The person may want to sign, finger-spell, lip-read or write notes. Consider using a notepad and pencil. Use body language because it provides important "clues" about what you are saying.

Rephrase rather than repeat. If the person didn't understand you, try using different words to express your ideas.

### When using an interpreter:

Speak at your normal speaking rate  
Speak directly to the individual, not to the interpreter and avoid saying "tell him..." or "ask her..."

## Serving People with Speech Disorders

People with speech disorders often have perfect hearing so you don't have to raise your voice to communicate. Be patient and listen carefully. People with speech disorders want to be understood as badly as you want to understand. Don't finish sentences or supply words. Allow the

person the time and patience to speak for themselves.

Ask people with speech disorders to repeat themselves if you don't understand. If you still can't understand, ask them to write their question down.

Avoid Noisy Situations. Talk in quiet places - background noise makes communication harder for both of you.

### **Serving People with Vision Impairments**

Announce your presence. Don't touch people with vision impairments unless they know you are there. Offer Your Arm. Allow the person to take your arm. You don't have to propel or lead a person with vision impairment. Volunteer information. Offer to read signs, menus, etc. On the street, mention if lights have changed and warn them about any areas of construction in their path.

Describe where anything the person needs to access are located. Using clock positions works well. For example, "There's a cup of coffee at 2:00 and cream and sugar at 10:00."

Don't Leave Abruptly. Let people with vision impairments know before you leave.

### **White Canes and Service Animals**

Never touch the cane. Step out of the way of the cane and allow the person to pass. If the person has a service animal, remember the animal is working. Don't distract him by petting or feeding.

### **Hidden Disabilities**

Not all disabilities are apparent. A person may have trouble following a conversation, may not respond when you call or wave, or may say or do something that seems inappropriate. The person may have a hidden disability, such as a seizure disorder, learning disability, brain injury, mental illness, or a health condition. These are just a few of the many different types of hidden disabilities. Don't make assumptions about the person or the disability. Be open-minded.

### **Service Animals**

Service animals are individually trained to provide assistance to people with a variety of disabilities. There are service animals that alert persons with hearing impairments to sounds; pull wheelchairs or carry and pick up things for persons with mobility impairments; and guide persons with visual impairments. Service animals are not pets and must be permitted to accompany the individual with a disability to all areas of the facility where customers are allowed to go. Do not distract the animal by petting or feeding them.



If you would like this information in an alternative format, please contact the City's ADA Office.

528-3227/Voice  
528-3101/TTY



**City of Las Cruces**

**ADA Advisory Committee**



**Disability Etiquette**

*Serving Customers  
With Disabilities*