

Cross Disability Etiquette

As we go through this module, we will be hitting the high points. It is not possible in the short time we have to cover all the issues related to disability. If you have questions, please email me (Doug Towne) at: chair-ceo@accessready.org

So, what do we mean by Cross Disability Etiquette?

First let me say that when it comes to the issues that face anyone with a disability, no one is born with this information even if you have a disability. The subject of disability etiquette is as vast as the population of people with disabilities themselves. In this lesson we have tried to hit the points that matter to all people with disabilities.

What is Disability?

The answers to the question what is disability, depends largely on who you ask.

- * The independent living community focused around the Centers for Independent Living believes that disability is a self-declared status,
- * while several different departments of the Federal Government establish their own definitions of disability.

A number of programmatic definitions of disability exist today.

Most of these definitions are used to determine eligibility for benefits such as:

- * Social Security Disability Insurance,
- * Special Education placement, and
- * compensation programs associated with service-connected injuries.

Definition of Disability Under the Americans with Disabilities Act:

- * Under the Americans with Disabilities Act,
- * Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and
- * Section 188 of the Workforce Investment Act,

A person with a disability is generally defined as someone who:

- * has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more "major life activities,
- * has a record of such an impairment, or
- * is regarded as having such an impairment.

The amended Americans with Disabilities Act establishes a new and more clearly defined legal definition.

On January 1st, 2009 amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) took effect.

- * The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA) broadens the definition of disability, thus increasing the number of individuals covered by the ADA.
- * The ADAAA retains the definition of "disability" as stated previously,
- * However, the ADAAA overrules four Supreme Court decisions and
- * Equal Employment Opportunity (EEOC) guidance,
(which have over time narrowed the scope of ADA coverage, to clarify how employers should correctly define the terms)
- * "substantially limits," "major life activities" and
- * "regarded as having such impairment."

Cross Disability Etiquette

Interacting with People with Disabilities:

When you interact with people with disabilities,

- * talk directly to them, not to their companions, aides, or interpreters.

The best place to start is to:

- * ask yourself how you want to be treated.

Try not to answer from a place of fear. I mention this because many people see a person with a disability and immediately go to a place of fear thinking:

- * "How terrible. What if that were me!"

People with and without disabilities appreciate the golden rule:

* treat others the way you would like to be treated.

Think of the person first, not their disability. Do not shy away from people with disabilities - relax and be yourself!

If you run into an awkward situation and you do not know what to do, just ask.

Some people with disabilities are fun to talk to, but when the conversation is riddled with unwarranted remarks such as "you're such an inspiration," the comment could feel objectifying. People with disabilities do not want to be viewed as inspirational things.

* Don't automatically assist someone with a disability without asking first. It is okay to offer help, but respect when someone says, "no."

* Do not pet the service animals of people who are blind, low-vision, or any other disability. It can distract the animal from doing its job.

* Service animals are well-trained and look as though they want to be petted.

* However, they take their jobs very seriously when they are working. They do not like to be distracted or separated from their owner.

* People with disabilities have sex with people with and without disabilities. There is no need to ask about logistics, because that would be awkward.

* Avoid saying "Good for you," "You're so brave" or other patronizing remarks toward people with disabilities. Remember, like you, people with disabilities are just trying to live their lives.

* Some people might have accommodation needs that you do not think about like not being able to be in a bright light, in noisy rooms, or near strong scents. Do not be offended if someone needs to leave the room or requests a separate space.

* Sometimes it looks like a person with a disability could use assistance but jumping in might be dangerous. For example, someone who looks as though they are struggling to open a door might actually be resting their weight on the door. Opening the door wider might cause a fall. How can you know for sure? Ask if they need a hand and do not take it personally if the answer is "no."