

## **Interacting with People with Disabilities**

A disability is an inconvenience in certain situations, it is not a tragedy. Don't treat it as such.

The following tips may help those folks that are new to working with persons with disabilities and reduce the anxiety on both sides:

- Always remember PERSON FIRST – Disability second
- Accept people with disabilities as an individual
- Listen to what people say. DON'T Assume!
- Be yourself, be natural, don't force, patronize or be solicitous
- The disability is not an illness, nor is it contagious
- Treat people appropriate to their age
- Speak directly to the person, NOT to their caretaker
- If person with disability has a communication problem, they will let you know and indicate their preferred method of communication
- Relax – together you will work it out and accomplish your intended goal

### **Exceptional Needs Do's and Don'ts (Common Courtesies)**

- Don't question the person's disability.
  - Hearing disabilities / impairments are invisible.
  - Some visual impairments are invisible.
- Don't regard the use of the hearing aid or mobility aid as a tragedy – they provide freedom and access.
- Don't be offended by the lack of response or behavior you may encounter by a person with special needs, it may take them a bit longer to respond.
  - Visual clues, eye contact, nods do not work with persons with visual impairments
  - Talking louder does not necessarily help a person with hearing impairments
- Use the words "hear" or "heard", "look", "see" - these are OK
- Identify yourself to the persons with disabilities
  - If the VI person extends his/her hand to shake, do so, otherwise, don't
  - When asking to be a guide, offer your elbow. Don't grab their arm or push them.
- Ask people who are hearing impaired what they want or need
- Speak directly to the person, not the interpreter
  - Don't direct questions through companion / interpreter
- Be aware and help the persons with disabilities be more aware, explain what is happening
  - The environment, the activities, the people, obstacles (stairs, sharp edges etc.)
- Use ordinary language and be specific
  - Don't point and say "over there",
  - Direct right / left to person's perspective, NOT your right / left
- Use gestures or write message down to ensure clarity of communication
- Identify yourself and ask, "May I help you?" – Don't assume they need help, or want it
- Address by name so the person knows you are speaking to them
- Do not walk away from person who is hearing impaired while talking to them
- Do not look away from person who is hearing impaired while talking to them
- Don't pet, play or feed hearing or seeing dogs
- Don't leave doors ajar
- Always put chairs back in place
  - Don't move furniture without reorienting VI person
- When seating a VI person, put their hand on the back of chair, allow them to seat themselves
- Use large print signage with strong color contrast
- In dangerous situations, say "STOP!", not "Look out!"