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Communication & Etiquette

"All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talent."

-John F. Kennedy

When interacting with a person with a disability, it is all right to recognize and acknowledge that an individual has a disability. You won't be telling them something they don't already know. As children, many of us were taught to ignore people with disabilities. It is also important, however, to put those differences in proper perspective. Consider the following suggestions when interacting with people with disabilities:

- When talking with someone who has a disability, speak directly to that person.
- Treat adults as adults. Call a person by his or her first name only when you're extending this familiarity to everyone present.
- Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions, such as "See you later" or "Got to be running along," that seems to relate to the person's disability.
- People with disabilities are entitled to the courtesies that you extend to anyone. This includes their personal privacy. If you don't generally ask people about their

complexions, or their incomes, then don't ask people with disabilities about theirs.

- If you don't make a habit of leaning or hanging on to people you're with, then don't lean or hang on someone's wheelchair. Wheelchairs are an extension of personal space for people who use them.

- Offer assistance to a person with a disability if you like, but wait until your offer is accepted before you help, and listen to any instructions the person may want to give.

- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to get things done or said. Let the person set the pace in walking and talking.

- When planning events involving people with disabilities, consider their needs ahead of time.

- Don't use terms and phrases that imply how a person feels about his or her disability. Don't define someone by their disability. Use terms that are up-to-date and non-derogatory.

- Commit yourself to communicating effectively, courteously, and appropriately.

Sources:

Tips for Disability Awareness.

Chicago: National Easter Seal Society.

"ADA Access Facts Series: References for the ADA," Achieving Physical and Communication Accessibility. Washington: National Center for Access Unlimited. 1991.