

## TEN COMMANDMENTS

### *For Communicating with Persons with Disabilities*

Adapted by Karen Meyer for United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc.

1. **When talking** with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through a companion.
2. **When introduced** to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting).
3. **When meeting** a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
4. **If you offer assistance**, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
5. **Treat adults as adults.** Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending that same familiarity to all others present. (Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder).
6. **Leaning or hanging** on a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
7. **Listen attentively** when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.
8. **When speaking** with a person in a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
9. **To get the attention** of a person who is hearing-impaired, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. Not all people with a hearing impairment can lip-read. For those who do lip-read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking.
10. **Relax.** Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions that seem to relate to the person's disability, such as "see you later", or "did you hear about this?"

## **DISABILITY ETIQUETTE**

### WHEN YOU MEET

- Extend your hand to shake, if that is what you typically do.
- Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.

### HELPING

- Do not automatically give assistance; ask first if the person wants help.
- Be the assistant, not the director.

### COMMUNICATION

- Talk directly to the person, not to the aide, friend, or interpreter.
- Ask him (her) to repeat if you don't understand.
- If the person uses a wheelchair, sit down and converse at their level.

### DISABILITY

- Don't treat the person as a disability.
- Caution – do not use words such as: "wheelchair bound", "disabled", "crippled", "invalid", etc.

### ENVIRONMENTS

- Be aware of clear paths of travel for people who use wheelchairs or are blind.

### TOUCHING

- Do not pet guide dogs, and do not touch a person with a disability unless there is a good reason (such as shaking hands in greeting, or if the person has requested assistance).
- Never push a person's wheelchair without their permission.

### AUXILIARY AIDS

- Do not touch someone's cane, wheelchair, or other device.

### HIDDEN DISABILITIES

- Be open-minded.