



arts4all
FLORIDA

Guest Service for Guests with Disabilities

What is a Disability?

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) definition of disability:

A person of any age is considered to have a disability if **any** of the following apply:

1. A person has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, such as hearing, seeing, walking, breathing or speaking.
2. A person has a record of a substantially limiting impairment to a major life activity, such as a person who has recovered from cancer or an individual previously categorized as having a learning disability
3. A person is regarded by others as having a substantially limiting impairment, which in reality either is not substantial (such as controlled high blood pressure) or does not cause any substantial limitations (such as a facial scar or physical disfigurement).

General Guidelines and Principles for Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

1. **RELAX: Treat people with respect and consideration.** See the person who has a disability as a person, not as a disability.
2. Maintain eye contact without staring.
3. Speak directly to the person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present.
4. 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 the left hand is OK as well.
5. If you offer assistance, wait for the offer to be accepted. Do not insist on providing assistance. Then ask and listen for instructions.
6. Offer a brief orientation to your facility. Don't take offense if it is refused.
7. In an effort to be helpful, people tend to talk much louder than necessary. Remember there is no disability which is served in this manner; don't yell.
8. Keep the guest informed ... communicate! Let them know what is going on if there is a delay or other unexpected situation.
9. Do not be embarrassed to use common expressions such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about..."
10. Use first names only if appropriate and do not pat people on the head or shoulder. Avoid that 'sing-songy' tone of voice often used with children and puppies and don't "talk down" to people with disabilities.
11. DO NOT touch or otherwise distract a service animal. Dog guides, hearing dogs, and service dogs are all working.

People First Language

Arts4All Florida promotes the use of “People First” Language—language that puts the focus on individuals rather than on a disability. People First Language helps us remember that people are unique individuals and when we label them by a medical diagnosis, we devalue and disrespect them as individuals.

Consider the following when speaking to or about people with disabilities:

- Emphasize abilities, not limitations.
- Do not use emotional descriptors such as unfortunate, pitiful and so forth.
- Do not use condescending euphemisms. They reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be dealt with up front.
- Do not sensationalize a disability by saying afflicted with, crippled with, suffers from, victim of, and so on.
- Do not portray successful people with disabilities as superhuman or heroes.

Examples of People First Language:

Affirmative Phrase	Negative Phrase
People with disabilities	The handicapped
A man who uses a wheelchair	The wheelchair-bound man
A woman who is blind or has low vision	The blind lady
A boy on the autism spectrum	The boy suffering from autism
A girl with a cognitive disability	The mentally retarded girl.

Keys to Quality Guest Service Interactions

Guests will continue to patronize businesses that:

- Welcome them,
- Are helpful,
- Are accessible, and
- Provide quality services.

Always ask:

“May I assist you?”

Follow up by asking:

“How may I assist you?”

The key to providing quality services to guests with disabilities is to remember that all guests are individuals. In most cases the best way to learn how to assist guests with disabilities is to ask them directly. Don’t take offense if your assistance is refused. Offer the guest the opportunity to state what assistance they may prefer. You will encounter people who appreciate your assistance and others who may reject your every effort to be helpful. There are numerous reasons why an individual may not want or need your assistance. Listen and learn from what the guest tells you regarding his or her needs.

Service Animals

Service animals serve a great variety of functions beyond “guide dogs.” They can fetch dropped items, alert owners of sounds, and even pull wheelchairs. **The ADA requires that service animals be able to accompany individuals with disabilities in all areas where members of the public are allowed to go.** Under Florida law you can only deny entry if the animal’s behavior poses a direct threat to the health and safety of others. A patron with a service animal cannot be segregated from other patrons.

Defining a service animal:

- A service animal is not a pet
- It is a dog or miniature horse trained to provide assistance to an individual with a disability
- The work done or tasks performed must be directly related to the individual’s disability
- The provision of emotional support, well-being, comfort, or companionship do not constitute work or tasks for purposes of this definition
- In Florida, service dogs in training are also covered

Identifying a Service Animal:

- There are currently no license or certificate requirements by the state of Florida
- They are not required to wear identifying “clothes”
- Per the ADA, you can ask:
 - Is the animal required because of a disability?
 - What work or task has the animal been trained to perform?
 - Are you training this animal as a service animal? (Florida law)

For more information, visit: https://www.ada.gov/service_animals_2010.htm

Assisting People with Mobility Disabilities

Mobility disabilities cover a wide range, from the person who has difficulty walking great distances to the person who uses a wheelchair all the time. A wheelchair may be the most visible sign of a disability, but it is important to remember that the wheelchair is a tool. The guest using the chair may or may not be able to walk without crutches, canes, braces, other aids, and may be using the wheelchair because it is faster, to conserve energy, or for increased mobility and greater access.

Assisting People Who Use Wheelchairs

There are several forms of mobility aids that have wheels: motorized power or battery-operated wheelchairs, manual wheelchairs, and three-wheeled scooters.

- A person using a power wheelchair will generally not need to be pushed.
- A person using a scooter will generally not need to be pushed.
- Individuals in manual chairs may or may not want assistance having their wheelchair pushed. Always ask first. You will see a type of wheelchair, commonly known as sports chair, that doesn't have handles on the back of the chair. These chairs are intended to be maneuvered by the person sitting in them and not by someone pushing.

Remember these basic tips:

- Don't lean, hang on, or touch a person's wheelchair. It is an extension of the person's body. If you bump into it, remember that a jolt may cause pain or discomfort.
- If a person is sitting or is short in stature, get on an eye to eye level if the conversation continues for more than a few minutes. Don't force someone to physically look up at you.
- If the front desk is too high, come around to the guest side during your interaction.
- Consider distance, weather and surfaces such as stair, curbs or inclines when giving directions.
- When pushing a wheelchair, be gentle and don't start, stop, or turn corners abruptly. When going up or down a slope, warn the person in the chair.
- Don't try to maneuver a chair with a person in it if you feel that you will lose control. Get assistance and use two people if necessary.
- If you have to "bump" a chair up or down a curb or step, ask the individual what direction they prefer. Some may wish for you to lead so that you take the person and the chair backwards.
- Never lift, transfer, or carry a person in a wheelchair up or down a flight of stairs, or in and out of their seats. This could present a safety hazard for you and the guest.
- If you are pushing someone in a wheelchair through a noisy area be aware that they may not hear you speak if you're directly behind them.
- Allow a person who uses a wheelchair or other mobility device to keep them within reach if they transfer to a seat, unless there are fire and safety considerations.

Assisting People Who Use a Walker, Cane, or Crutches

Remember these basic tips:

- Never grab a cane or walker to assist someone. If they have a mobility aid such as a cane, crutch, or walker, the guest may be safer using those than holding on to you.
- Offer your arm, never grab or take their free hand or arm. This could cause the guest to stumble or fall.
- Always ask the individual if they would prefer for you to stand to their right or left.
- Warn guests about changes in level or texture of the floor. Be aware of modifying your pace. Walk slower, so that you aren't rushing the guest.
- Warn the guest about changes in light. If you are moving from an area that is brightly lit to a dark space, or vice-a-versa, give the guest's eyes time to adjust.
- Offer your arm when going up or down stairs or a ramp without handrails.

Storing Mobility Aids

When the motor of a power wheelchair or scooter is turned off, it can be difficult to move. If a guest is transferring from their wheelchair/scooter to a theater seat and there isn't room for the wheelchair/scooter by their seat, they may wish to leave the scooter nearby.

Many theaters have a designated area to store mobility aids and have ushers who can bring them to the guest at intermission and the end of the show.

It is not recommended to ride or try to "drive" a guest's scooter. This can be dangerous to you and other guests. If a guest requests assistance for you to move a power wheelchair or scooter, ask for the guest for instructions.

Assisting People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision

Guests with vision loss will range from those who are completely blind to those who can't adjust quickly to changes in lighting conditions. A person who is legally blind can see at 20 feet what a person with vision can see at 200 feet. Total blindness is the complete absence of vision and light perception. Many people with vision loss have light perception or may see various images or fields of images.

Remember These Basic Tips:

- Introduce yourself. State your name and position.
- Use a normal tone of voice and speed, there is no need to yell or exaggerate your speech.
- Use the person's name or gently touch their hand/arm when starting a conversation so they know you are talking to them and they can determine your location in the room.
- Tell the person if you leave or move away from the conversation.
- Don't hesitate to use the words "look" and "see".
- When giving directions, be as clear and specific as possible. For example: instruct the individual to "move forward or continue in your path of travel" rather than "go straight" or "straight ahead". Identify landmarks that their cane may encounter like a potted plant, water fountain, or noises like a humming soda machine. Estimate the distance in steps. Point out obvious obstacles in the direct path of travel as well as changes in surface level such as stairs or ramps, and floor textures such as carpet and wood floors.

Assisting as a Sighted Guide

Being a sighted guide is a way of walking with and guiding a person who is visually impaired safely and efficiently.

- When offering to serve as a guide, you should identify yourself and ask if the person would like assistance.
- If they request assistance, touch the back of their hand with the back of your hand, telling the person to take your arm just above your elbow.
- The person who has a visual impairment should walk a half-step behind you and follow the movements of your body as you walk. While you walk, you should explain where you are going, what you are passing, and obstacles that you are avoiding.
- When you are entering a narrow passage, tell the person you are guiding that you are entering a narrow area. You should move so that your arm is behind your back. This directs the person to walk behind you.
- Tell the person you are guiding when approaching steps or an escalator. Explain which way the steps are going, up or down, and how many there are. Encourage the person to place their hand on the handrail, if there is one. Walk up or down the steps in front of the person. Let the person know when you come to the landing or to the last step.

- When approaching a curb, pause briefly at the very edge of the curb and say whether the curb goes up or down.
- When coming to a door, stop first, then say whether the door opens toward or away from you, and whether it opens to the right or the left. The person being guided can then move to the appropriate side. Open the door and proceed.
- When sitting down, guide the person's hand to the back of the chair and tell him or her whether the chair has arms.

Assisting People Who Use Guide Dogs or Canes

There are three main ways people who are blind or have low vision travel: with a guide dog, with a cane, and without adaptive assistance.

- Guide Dogs: While the dog is in harness that dog is "working", and you should never pet, talk to, feed, or otherwise distract it. Sometime a person with a guide dog may request you walk behind their left or right shoulder and give verbal direction. Always ask the guest which he or she prefers. The guest may opt to have the dog follow you or else ask you to be a sighted guide. If the dog follows you, be aware that it is easy to get separated in a crowd and that it is useful for you to give verbal directions and warnings.
- Canes: People who use canes will either follow you or ask you to be a sighted guide. Walk on the side opposite the cane. Guests detect objects and potential obstacles by swinging the cane in a wide arc but cannot detect overhangs (i.e. exhibit cases, wall mounted signs, etc). You need to verbally warn them of these potential obstacles.
- Without adaptive assistance: People who don't use guide dogs or canes frequently do not appear blind. It is important not to make assumptions concerning how much a person can see simply by the way they look. The person still may benefit from the use of a sighted guide. They may have limited vision or difficulty with light and shadow perception.

Assisting People Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. One person may be able to hear everything but very high-pitched sounds while another may hear only the roar of a jet engine and another hears nothing. The range of hearing loss includes the person who has age-related mild hearing loss to the person who is congenitally (born) deaf. Many individuals with hearing loss benefit from the use of assistive listening systems.

Terminology:

- **Hard of Hearing:** People who have usable residual hearing or who use hearing aids to amplify sounds.
- **Deaf:** People who have little or no usable residual hearing.

Remember These Basic Tips:

- Get the person's attention tactfully. Wave your hand, gently tap their hand/shoulder, or flash the lights.
- Ask the person how he or she prefers to communicate (lip reading, sign language, writing, etc) and accommodate as best you can.
- Speak clearly and slowly, but don't exaggerate or shout. This does not help the person to hear.
- Keep your sentences short.
- Try to rephrase a thought rather than repeating the same words. If the person doesn't understand you, try to re-state the sentence.
- Be a lively speaker. Use facial expressions that match your tone of voice, and use gestures, body language and pantomime to communicate.
- Don't be embarrassed about communicating via pencil and paper. Getting the message across is more important than the medium used.
- If a sign language interpreter is involved, speak directly to the person who is deaf – not the interpreter.

Facilitating Lip Reading

Some people who are deaf or hard of hearing will read lips, but it is generally believed that only approximately 50% of what is spoken can easily read and understood.

- Make sure you are facing the light.
- Look directly at the person while speaking. Even a slight turn of the head can obscure the person's vision.
- Keep your hands and hair away from your mouth. Be aware if you are a full-mustached or bearded man that you may be difficult or impossible to lip read.
- Speak naturally: don't over enunciate or exaggerate words and do not raise your voice.

Assisting People Who Have Speech Disorders

Speech disorders are varied and can occur at any age. Regardless of the severity of the speech disorder, a person's ability to interact and communicate with others will be affected. Speech and language disorders can interfere with a person's ability to understand, to express his or her thoughts, or to be understood. Their causes are varied. They may be present from birth, or they can occur in childhood or later in life due to accident or illness. While a speech disorder affects one's ability to speak words so they are understandable, many people with speech disorders have no problem understanding or reasoning.

Remember These Basic Tips:

- Address the person with the speech disorder directly. Do not assume someone with a speech disorder lacks the capacity to understand.
- Give your complete attention to the person who has difficulty speaking.
- Be patient. Do not correct and do not speak for the person. Allow extra time for the person to articulate what they are trying to convey.
- If you do not understand something, do not pretend that you do. Ask the guest to repeat what he or she said and then repeat back the parts that you understand.
- Do not supply words or finish thoughts for the person.
- Do not urge a person who stutters to slow down or start over. This tends to make the stuttering worse.
- Speak clearly and distinctly but naturally. Be aware that people might feel like you are "talking down" to them if you speak too slowly.
- Keep your manner encouraging. The longer you talk, the easier it will become to understand. People with speech disorders want to be understood as much as you want to understand. Often the guest is used to having to repeat things in order to be better understood.
- Ask questions that require short answers.
- Consider writing as an alternative means of communicating, but first ask the person if that is acceptable. Have pens and paper available.
- Ask for assistance only after making every effort to understand the guest. People tend to give up too quickly when encountering people who have speech disorders. Seek assistance from another docent, volunteer or staff person as a last resort. Always be respectful of the guest when asking for assistance.

Other Methods of Communication: Augmentative/Alternative Communication

Achieving effective communication is more important than the method used and there are many ways to facilitate conversation. Using a communication device can take longer, so be patient and allow the individual to finish before you try to respond.

- Communication board: A communication board can be as simple as someone pointing to various pictograms (pictures that represent concepts) or commonly used words or phrases, cut out and pasted on a piece of cardboard or on a computer or iPad screen.
- Speech-generating device: A speech-generating device allows users to type out words, phrases, or sentences that are converted into computerized speech or text.

Assisting People Who Have Cognitive Disabilities

As with all other disabilities, cognitive disabilities have a wide range of manifestations, from the individual with dyslexia whose reading speed may be slower, to the individual who requires a personal assistant to accomplish daily tasks. Clinical diagnosis of a cognitive disability can include Down syndrome, traumatic brain injury (TBI), autism, dementia, Attention Deficient Disorder (ADD), and more.

Remember, people with cognitive disabilities often have good hearing and vision, but the message is not processed properly once it is received. The category of intellectual disabilities is included in this category.

Remember These Basic Tips:

- Speak slowly and distinctly. Support what you are saying with body language and other visual cues.
- Break information into smaller concepts.
- Give specific instructions and set simple guidelines. Don't underestimate the individual's potential to understand you.
- Give extra time for the person to process a response to your questions.
- Phrase instructions in the positive. For example, "Walk carefully and slowly inside, it is very dark" is more easily understood than "Don't fall".
- Help the person feel comfortable. Maintain a pleasant voice and facial expression.
- Treat the adult who has a cognitive disability as an adult, not a child. Don't "talk down" to the individual.
- Consider moving to an area with fewer distractions, allowing for more direct focused contact.
- Some information processing problems may affect social skills such as an unconventional or a complete lack of response. Do not confuse this with rudeness.