

# Disability

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# Education

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# Programs



Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services • 8004 Franklin Farms Drive • P.O. Box K300 •  
Richmond, VA 23288-0300 • Voice 1-800-552-5019 • TTY 1-800-464-9950 • [www.vdrs.org](http://www.vdrs.org)

# *Disability Awareness Training*

## **What is disability awareness?**

- ❖ An interactive and open forum for examining the stereotypes and misconceptions about persons with disabilities
- ❖ Changing attitudes and behaviors that prevent growth of the company or organization
- ❖ Developing skills that will help staff effectively communicate and work with persons with disabilities

## **Who is it for?**

- ❖ Employers
- ❖ Managers/Supervisors
- ❖ HR professionals
- ❖ Other Staff

## **How can your company or organization benefit from disability awareness?**

- ❖ Quality of your company or organization's workforce is improved
- ❖ Increased productivity, creativity, and opportunity
- ❖ Enhanced employee relations
- ❖ Ability to provide services that cater to consumers with disabilities



# *Basic Disability Etiquette*

## **General Tips for Interviewing People with Disabilities**

- ❖ Conduct interviews in a manner that emphasizes abilities, achievements and individual qualities.
- ❖ Conduct your interview as you would with anyone. Be considerate without being patronizing.
- ❖ If it appears that a person's disability inhibits performance of a job, focus on HOW the person can perform the job.

### **Example:**

*Inappropriate:* "I notice that you are in a wheelchair and I wonder how you will be able to do this job."

*Appropriate:* "As you can see from the job description, this position requires some lifting and moving. Do you foresee any difficulty in performing the required tasks? If so, do you have any suggestions how these tasks can be performed?"

## **General Tips for Communicating with People with Disabilities**

- ❖ Always focus on the individual, not the disability. Use "people first" language – meaning, refer to the individual first, then to his or her disability. (It is better to say "the person with a disability" rather than "the disabled.")
- ❖ When communicating with an individual with a disability, speak directly to the person with the disability rather than their companion or interpreter.
- ❖ When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. If the person has limited hand use or has an artificial limb, it is ok to shake what is offered to you. It is equally acceptable to politely touch them on the shoulder/arm or offer a smile or nod to reciprocate a warm greeting.



## Basic Disability Etiquette

- ❖ Any and all assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, canes, communication boards, service animals, etc. should always be respected as personal property or *extensions* of that person. Do not use, lean on, play with or move unless given permission.
- ❖ If you would like to offer assistance to a person with a disability, always ask first, wait until the offer is accepted, then listen patiently and follow their instructions. If the person declines your help, respect their decision and do not proceed to assist.
- ❖ Relax. It is ok to use expressions such as "See you later," or "Did you hear about this?" as it is common phrases that everyone uses, including people with disabilities.
- ❖ As with all other etiquette issues, when mistakes are made, apologize, correct the problem, learn from the mistake, and move on.

### General Tips of Accommodation for People with Disabilities

- ❖ Don't assume a person cannot perform a certain task. With the right accommodations and support, anyone can be productive. In terms of accommodation, the person with the disability knows best what he or she needs. Ask what works best and work with them to make any necessary accommodations.
- ❖ Keep hallways and office spaces clear from excess clutter that may make it difficult for people to maneuver around or reach equipment such as fax machines, copiers, printers, etc.
- ❖ Disseminate company information, announcements or events through various methods of communication such as email, voicemail, flyers, brochure, etc.
- ❖ Provide accessible restrooms, drinking fountains and telephones. If such facilities are not available, be ready to offer alternatives, such as a private or employee restroom, a glass of water, or a desk phone.
- ❖ When planning a meeting or other event, try to anticipate specific accommodations that a person with a disability might need. If a barrier cannot be avoided, let the person know ahead of time.
- ❖ Transportation is often a major issue for those who have to depend on others to get them to and from work. Offering flexible work schedules is a way to accommodate transportation needs.



## Basic Disability Etiquette

- ❖ Be prepared. Encourage fellow employees to learn how to assist persons with disabilities in cases of emergency including proper evacuation procedures or medical emergencies.
- ❖ Help encourage interaction between employees with disabilities and their co-workers. Include employees with disabilities in group activities, meetings, and social gatherings. Forming workgroups or teams with interdependent tasks is an excellent way to enhance employee relations.
- ❖ Be approachable. Saying “If you need anything, just ask,” speaks volumes in terms of reassuring the person with a disability that you are willing to help.



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# *Tips for Working with Persons with SPECIFIC Disabilities*

## **Employees with Mobility Impairments**

*Persons with mobility impairments have limited use or have lost the function of their limb(s) or an entire portion of their body. Depending of the location and scope of the loss, the person may have difficulty physically handling things or may require support for some other function. Appropriate support and accommodation from assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, prosthetics, computerized head sticks and other equipment enable persons with physical disabilities to become independent and productive members of the workplace.*

### **Interviewing tips**

- ❖ When scheduling interviews, be aware that applicants may need to make transportation arrangements. In giving directions, consider accessible traveling routes, accessible parking spaces, and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs or steep hills that may hinder or delay a person using a wheel chair, cane or crutches.
- ❖ If the interview area is inaccessible, be prepared to find an alternate location.
- ❖ Be aware that some wheelchair users may choose to transfer themselves out of their wheelchairs (into an office chair, for example) for the duration of the interview.
- ❖ Enable people who use crutches, canes or wheelchairs to keep them within reach during the interview.

### **Communication tips**

- ❖ Never lean on the person's wheelchair, unless permitted. The chair is part of the space that belongs to the person who uses it.
- ❖ When talking with a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, “squat down” or use a chair, if possible, in order to place yourself at the person's eye level to facilitate conversation.
- ❖ Do not *talk down* to the person or make inappropriate gestures such as patting the person on the head. Refrain from using remarks such as “you have a license to drive that thing” or “how fast can that go” to initiate conversation with persons in wheelchairs.



## Specific Disabilities - Mobility Impairments

### Accommodations

- ❖ Help organize materials or position office equipment such as fax machines, printers, etc. at a comfortable height and reach
- ❖ Do not pile materials underneath tables as it hinders persons using wheelchairs from pulling up to the tables.



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## Employees who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing

*Persons who are deaf or hard-of-hearing communicate in different ways. In the United States, most people who are deaf use American Sign Language (ASL). ASL, however, is not a universal language and is a language with its own syntax and grammatical structure. Some persons who are deaf use speech, sign, or fingerspell; not all people who are deaf can lip-read either. The key in working with persons who are deaf and hard of hearing is to find out what techniques they prefer to use.*

### Interviewing tips

- ❖ If the interviewee can lip-read, look directly at him or her and speak clearly at a normal pace. Do not exaggerate your lip movements or shout. Speak expressively because the person will rely on your facial expressions, gestures and eye contact.
- ❖ If an interpreter is present at the interview, it is commonplace for the interpreter to be seated beside the interviewer, across from the interviewee. Interpreters only facilitate communication. They should not be consulted or regarded as a reference for the interview. Also, keep in mind that just because someone uses a sign language interpreter during the interview does not mean that he or she will require an interpreter at all times to do their work.

### Communication tips

- ❖ To get the attention of a person with a hearing impairment, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand.
- ❖ When speaking, look directly at the person and speak clearly, naturally and slowly to establish if the person can read lips. Not all persons with hearing impairments can lip-read. Those who can will rely on facial expression and other body language to help in understanding.
- ❖ Show consideration by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping your hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking.
- ❖ Do not shout at a hearing impaired person. Shouting distorts sounds accepted through hearing aids and inhibits lip reading.
- ❖ If you are with someone with a hearing disability in a group, provide whatever support with which the person is comfortable so that the person can follow what is being said.



## Specific Disabilities – Deaf and Hard of Hearing

### Accommodations

- ❖ Assistive devices such as Text Telephones (TTY's) or visual alerts such as signal lights on phones or office doors are examples of accommodation for persons who are deaf or hard of hearing.
- ❖ Teach any unusual or specific words and terms that are part of that workplace.



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## Employees with Blind and Vision Impairments

*When we think of blindness, we tend to think of total darkness. However, there are varying degrees of sight. A person considered “legally blind” may not be able to recognize a person across the room, but may still be able to see printed materials when held very close. Low vision can likely be affected by light, direction, movement, or glare. With the right accommodation and support, people who are blind or visually impaired have the same range of abilities as anyone else.*

### Interviewing tips

- ❖ When greeting a person with vision impairment always identify yourself and introduce anyone else who might be present at the interview. Describe the interview setting (for example, say, “There is a table in front of you and a seat to your right.”)
- ❖ When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat. A verbal cue is helpful as well. Use specifics such as "left ten feet" or "right two yards" when directing a person with a visual impairment.
- ❖ Provide a well-lit area for the interview. Avoid sharp contrasts of light and darkness. A person’s visual acuity may change under differing light conditions.
- ❖ Offer assistance in filling out forms. Most persons with visual impairments can fill out forms and sign their names if the appropriate spaces are indicated to them.

### Communication tips

- ❖ When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. **EXAMPLE:** “*On my right is Robert Smith.*”
- ❖ When conversing in a group, identify the person to whom you are speaking. Let the person know if you move or need to end the conversation.
- ❖ Do not shout at a person who is blind or visually impaired – he or she can hear you!
- ❖ Never automatically guide a person with a vision impairment. Allow the person to take your arm (at or about the elbow) - this will enable you to guide rather than propel or lead the person.
- ❖ Avoid pointing or using un-descriptive directions such as “over there” or “up ahead”. More appropriate words are “two feet to your left” or “beside you on your right”.



## Specific Disabilities – Blind and Vision Impairments

### Accommodations

- ❖ Hand-held magnifiers, Braille labels, or screen reader software are examples of low and high tech accommodations
- ❖ When describing a work routine, be specific with your language.

#### Example:

*Inappropriate: “The files go here.”*

*Appropriate: “The finished files go in the top drawer of the filing cabinet on the left of your desk.”*

- ❖ Help the person become acquainted with the workplace environment. Describe or point out location of the bathrooms, water fountains, exits, etc. Also point out office hazards such as file cabinets in the hallways, desks, or other equipment.
- ❖ Ask how the person prefers to handle regularly written or printed materials. Be prepared to read the information if the person asks that he/she would like a reader.



## **Employees who have Cognitive or Psychiatric Disabilities**

*Since cognitive disabilities are invisible disabilities, it may not be noticed unless disclosed from the person. Varying degrees of this type of disability effect differently from person to person. Persons with learning disabilities typically have average to above average intelligence, and can be highly functional when given appropriate support and training.*

### **Interviewing tips**

- ❖ Rephrase comments or questions for clarity.
- ❖ Stay focused on the person as he or she responds to you.

### **Communication tips**

- ❖ Speak in a normal volume, tone, and pace.
- ❖ Act as a peer at an adult-to-adult level.
- ❖ Don't assume the person is not listening just because you are getting no verbal or visual feedback. Ask her whether she understands or agrees.
- ❖ Don't assume you have to explain everything to people with learning disabilities. They do not necessarily have a problem with general comprehension.

### **Accommodations**

- ❖ Adjust work schedules to allow for sick or medical leave.
- ❖ Simplify a task by modifying procedures or allow extra time to learn procedures.
- ❖ Teach multi-stepped tasks one by one. Have written instructions available for the person to refer to when necessary.
- ❖ Make a checklist to help the person remember what needs to be done and in what order. Utilize a calendar to show due dates and timelines.
- ❖ Install wall partitions around workstation to minimize distractions.



## Employees with Speech and Language Impairments

*Persons with Speech and Language Impairments often have difficulty expressing their thoughts verbally, which may not be associated with any cognitive or learning disabilities. Impairments in speech are often a result of a trauma such as a stroke or other pre-existing physical disability.*

### Interviewing and Communication tips

- ❖ Listen attentively when you're talking to a person who has speech impairment.
- ❖ Exercise patience rather than attempting to speak for a person with speech difficulty. When 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. Repeat what you understand and the person's reactions will clue you in and guide you to understanding.
- ❖ Speak with a normal tone of voice. Most speech-impaired persons can hear and understand without difficulty.

### Accommodations

- ❖ Communication boards or speech and voice enhancement equipment are examples of assistive devices that help persons with speech impairments communicate.
- ❖ If necessary, use email or other forms of written speech to enhance the means of communication.



# *Service Animals*

## **Fact:**

Although the most familiar types of service animals are guide dogs used by people who are blind, service animals are assisting persons who have other disabilities as well. Many disabling conditions are invisible. Therefore, every person who is accompanied by a service animal may or may not "look" disabled.

## **What is a Service Animal?**

A service animal is **NOT** a pet! According to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a *service animal* is any animal that has been individually trained to provide assistance or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a physical or mental disability which substantially limits one or more major life functions.

## **Service Animal Access**

The civil rights of persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animals in all places of public and housing accommodations is protected by the following Federal laws:

- ◆ Americans with Disabilities Act, ADA (1990)
- ◆ Air Carrier Access Act (1986)
- ◆ Fair Housing Amendments Act (1988)
- ◆ Rehabilitation Act (1973)

## *Service Dog Etiquette*

- ◆ Do not touch the Service Animal, or the person it assists, without permission.
- ◆ Do not make noises at the Service Animal - It may distract the animal from doing its job.
- ◆ Do not feed the Service Animal - It may disrupt his/her schedule.
- ◆ Do not be offended if the person does not feel like discussing his/her disability or the assistance the Service Animal provides. Not everyone wants to be a walking-talking "show and tell" exhibit.

source: ADA Information Homepage, City of Sacramento, *Disability Etiquette*; [www.sacto.org/adaweb](http://www.sacto.org/adaweb)



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# ***Your Community Resources***

## **Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services**

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The Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) provides programs and services that connect employers who are seeking skilled and qualified employees, with persons with disabilities seeking employment opportunities. Business Services such as staffing, job analysis, job training, and disability awareness training provide businesses with the resources necessary to ensure quality recruitment.

## **Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired**

397 Azalea Avenue  
Richmond, VA 23227  
1-800-622-2155 (Voice/TTY)  
[www.vdbvi.org](http://www.vdbvi.org)

The Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (VDBVI) provides expertise with the needs of individuals who have low vision or combined loss of vision and hearing. VDBVI helps businesses accommodate blind or visually impaired individuals into the workplace.

## **Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

1602 Rolling Hills Drive  
Richmond, VA 23229-5012  
1-800-552-7917 (Voice / TTY)  
[www.vddhh.org](http://www.vddhh.org)

More than 22 million deaf and hard-of-hearing people live and work in the United States today. The Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH) provides businesses with resources that help in communicating, working with and accommodating persons who are deaf and hard-of-hearing.

## **Virginia Commonwealth University – RRTC**

Voice (804) 828-1851, TTY (804) 828-2494  
[www.worksupport.com](http://www.worksupport.com)

Based on collaborative relationships with business and organizations, VCU's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center connects companies to information, resources, and services that lead to the employment of persons with disabilities.



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# *Resources for Disability Information*

## Accommodations:

### ❖ **The Job Accommodations Network (JAN)**

West Virginia University  
P.O. Box 6080  
Morgantown, West Virginia 26506  
800/526-7234 (voice/TTY) – Accommodations information  
800/232-9675 (voice/TTY) – ADA information  
<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu>

### ❖ **Architectural and Transportation Barriers**

Compliance Board  
1331 F Street, NW, Suite 1000  
Washington, DC 20004-1111  
800/872-2253 (voice)  
800/993-2822 (TTY)  
<http://www.access-board.gov/>

### ❖ **Virginia Assistive Technology System**

800/435-8490 (voice/TTY)  
<http://www.vats.org>

### ❖ **National Braille Press.**

88 St. Stephen Street  
Boston, MA 02115  
(617) 266-6160 (VOICE)  
(617) 437-0456 (FAX)  
(800) 548-7323 (Catalog Department)  
\*information on getting publications, job applications, etc. in alternate format  
for persons with visual disabilities

## Americans with Disabilities Act Information and Technical Assistance:

### ❖ **ADA Information Center**

451 Hungerford Drive  
Suite 607  
Rockville, MD 20850  
800/949-4232 (voice/TTY)  
<http://www.adainfo.org>



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## Resources

- ❖ **Department of Justice – ADA Business Connection**  
<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/business.htm>

### **Website Accessibility:**

- ❖ **Bobby 3.2** - free service to help Webpage authors identify and repair significant barriers to access by individuals with disabilities. <http://www.cast.org/bobby/>
- ❖ **Triple-A Conformance to Website for Content Accessibility** – Pages bearing the logo states conformance to guidelines on web accessibility to users with disabilities.  
<http://www.w3.org/WAI/WCAG1AAA-Conformance>
- ❖ **HTML Validation Service** - Checks HTML documents for conformance to HTML recommendations and standards. <http://validator.w3.org/>
- ❖ **“Promoting Website Accessibility is Providing Alternatives”** – brochure can be ordered by calling 1-800-552-5019.

### **Information on Disability Employment Practices:**

- ❖ **Office of Disability Employment Policy**  
1331 F Street, NW Suite 300  
Washington D.C. 20004  
202-376-6200 (voice)  
202-376-6205 (TTD)  
<http://www.dol.gov/dol/odep/>
- ❖ **Society for Human Resource Management**  
1800 Duke Street  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314  
Phone: 703/548-3440; Fax: 703/535-6490  
<http://www.shrm.org>  
\* SHRM members have access to *Diversity Tool Kit*
- ❖ **Virginia Business Leadership Network**  
c/o SunTrust Bank, Mid-Atlantic  
919 East Main Street, HDQ 6418  
P.O. Box 26665  
Richmond, VA 23261-6665  
Phone: 866-624-3502; Fax: 804/782-7975  
Email: [katherine.mccary@suntrust.com](mailto:katherine.mccary@suntrust.com)



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### **Additional Resources on Disabilities:**

- ❖ **The Chartbook on Work and Disability** - facts and figures on work and disability  
<http://www.infouse.com/disabilitydata/workdisability.html>
- ❖ **National Institute of Mental Health**  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>
- ❖ **Reasonable Accommodations for People with Psychiatric Disabilities: An On-line Resource for Employers and Educators**  
<http://www.bu.edu/cpr/reasaccom>
- ❖ **National Institute On Deafness and Other Communication Disorders**  
<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/>
- ❖ **National Center for Learning Disabilities**  
<http://www.nclld.org/>
- ❖ **American Foundation for the Blind** – information and resources for employing persons with visual impairments  
<http://www.afb.org>

### **Tax Credits:**

- ❖ **Internal Revenue Service**  
[http://www.irs.gov/bus\\_info/index.html](http://www.irs.gov/bus_info/index.html)

