

Wheelchair etiquette

When someone in an office is in a wheelchair, people find it difficult to know how to behave around them. Consider these pointers to ensure your efforts aren't perceived in the wrong light.

Many people are unsure of how to approach a person in a wheelchair without being offensive. Fears of saying or doing something inappropriate to a person in a wheelchair may lead people to avoid them altogether. Memorising the right etiquette and watching what you say to avoid an embarrassing slip doesn't have to consume your thoughts. If you try to ignore the wheelchair and the disability and focus on the person – you're on the right track.

Consider these simple tips on wheelchair etiquette.

- Focus on the person, not the disability
- Never make assumptions about a person's intellect because they are in a wheelchair
- Don't hesitate to shake the person's hand, even if they don't have full use of their hands
- Don't assist a person in a wheelchair without asking if they need help first
- Just as you would avoid invading a colleague's body space, don't hang on a person's wheelchair
- Don't avoid speaking directly to the person in the wheelchair
- For practical reasons, consider sitting down so that you can be on the same eye level when you're having a long conversation with a person in a wheelchair
- Avoid demeaning actions like patting your colleague on the head
- Don't make assumptions that people in wheelchairs are sick. A wheelchair is a device used as an aid for adapting to normal life
- Don't talk to or pet guide dogs. While they are trained to avoid distraction, keep in mind that they are doing a job.
- Be considerate when arranging meetings. Check the accessibility of the venue before-hand.
- Never park in a specially marked parking bay.
- When talking to someone in a wheelchair, make eye contact and speak as you normally would.
- If you require specific information to accommodate a wheelchair user, ask them. But don't probe them out of curiosity.
- Introducing children to a person in a wheelchair may be an embarrassing experience and parents often shush their children. This isn't necessary.

Source: wheelchairnet.org

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