

Interacting with People with Disabilities in Places of Public Accommodation

About this module

Goal: To enhance participants' effectiveness and comfort when interacting with people with disabilities

Format: PowerPoint Presentation

Time: 20 minutes

Potential audience: General audiences, employers/business leaders, educators

Materials needed: PPT slides and facilitator's guide

Facilitator's Notes for this Module

This module focuses on how to interact with people with disabilities in Title III entities.



Trainer's Name
Trainer's Title

Phone
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1



National Network
Instructors, Guidance and Training on the
Americans with Disabilities Act

Facilitator's Notes (Slide 1)

Include your name and contact information here.



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Disclaimer

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2



Facilitator's Notes (Slide 2)

Change this slide to reflect your regional information.

Trainers, be sure to advise participants that this training is not intended as legal advice.



When I think about customers with disabilities, the first thing that comes to mind is...



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4



Facilitators Notes (Slide 3)

Ask participants to think of a word or phrase that immediately comes to mind when they think about customers with disabilities. Tell them this is a self-reflective activity and they won't be asked to share their thoughts. The goal of this exercise is to get people to become aware of assumptions they have about providing service to people with disabilities. Whether their assumptions are good or bad doesn't really matter at this point, the goal is to just help them to understand that they do hold assumptions. We'll revisit this later.



Looking at Disability from a Different Angle

From Pity...

Tragic
Helpless
Angry/vengeful
All alike
Half a person
Object of inspiration

To Pride...

Do things a little differently
Disability is part of identity
Have goals and dreams
Unique perspective
Whole person



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Facilitators Notes (Slide 4)

First, it is important to consider the human experience of disability. Like other minority groups, there is a cultural experience that is shared by many people with disabilities. Some of the perspectives and views of this population have changed significantly over the years. For example, in the past it was not uncommon for negative words and images to be the norm when thinking about people with disabilities. However, today it is more common for people with disabilities to view themselves, and be viewed by others, as people who do things a little differently and deserve the same access and opportunities as others.

Note: As with any group, one cannot generalize that these are the experiences of everyone with a disability, or everyone who interacts with a person with a disability. These slides are intended to show you some of the perceptions that have been held and experiences that have occurred over the course of history and how views about disability have changed. They are also meant to encourage you to think about how you view disability and whether this view needs changing.



Variety of Disabilities

- Physical (mobility, strength, dexterity, stamina)
- Sensory (vision, hearing, speech)
- Non-obvious disabilities (intellectual, cognitive, psychiatric, learning disabilities; health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, etc.)



Facilitators Notes (Slide 5)

Physical disabilities can result from a variety of conditions or injuries. With physical disabilities, individuals may use different means of getting around, including scooters, walkers, canes, wheelchairs, etc. Sensory disabilities relate to disabilities in any of the 5 senses. Visual disabilities include blindness and low-vision. Hearing disabilities include deafness. People who are deaf may communicate using American Sign Language (ASL), and people with hearing impairments may use hearing aids, assistive listening devices, etc. People with speech impairments may be able to hear fine but have difficulty speaking – an example might be someone who had a stroke. Non-obvious disabilities are disabilities that are not visible. They include learning disabilities, brain injuries, mental illnesses, intellectual disabilities, epilepsy, cancer, among others.

As you can see, there are many types of disabilities and it is important to remember that like all your guests/patrons – you should base your service on individual needs and not try to guess what the guest might require.



General Considerations

- Relax — don't be afraid to make a mistake
- Treat adults as adults
- Offer assistance, and if accepted, follow the person's lead
- Address the person directly, not a companion or interpreter
- Do not distract a service animal



Facilitators Notes (Slide 6)

There are a few rules of thumb to keep in mind when working with people who may have disabilities. First and foremost, remember that if you are focusing on the person and what they need – it's OK if you make a mistake! As long as you are making an honest effort to treat the person as a valued customer, they will most likely not fault you for your error. One of the most disheartening experiences for a person with a disability is when someone who is serving them (e.g., at a restaurant) defers to a companion versus interacting directly with the person with a disability. Best practice says you should interact with the person with a disability as you would any customer, if they need the assistance of a companion or an accommodation, they will let you know. Remember that while it's tempting to interact with service animals who enter your establishment - they are working and the person with a disability depends on them to ensure their safety.



Let's Take A Little Quiz!



True or False?

The terms “the disabled” and “people with disabilities” are roughly equivalent



Facilitators Notes (Slide 7)

Throughout the next several slides there will be questions presented for the group to think about and answer. Here is the first question.



FALSE

“People with disabilities” illustrates “Person First” language by identifying individuals with disabilities as people first vs. identifying them by their disability



Facilitators Notes (Slide 8)

The main difference between the two terms is that in the latter, the person comes first and is modified, but not solely identified, by his or her disability. “The disabled” or “disabled people” focuses on disability first, which can mistakenly imply that disability is the primary or most important quality about individuals.



Physical Disabilities

- Personal space includes an individual's wheelchair, cane, or other mobility aid
- If you interact with a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, seat yourself so that you are both at eye level




Facilitators Notes (Slide 9)

It is not ok to touch a person's wheelchair, push them, etc. without their invitation to do so.

Interacting with the person at eye level is respectful. It also means that the person using the wheelchair does not have to continually look up, which can be uncomfortable especially during longer conversations.





Another Question!


How might you greet someone who has an upper
body mobility impairment when meeting them
for the first time?



Facilitators Notes (Slide 10)

Share the question with the audience, the answer appears on the next slide.



- 
- Acknowledge the person!
 - Extend your hand
 - Smiling and introducing yourself works well, whether or not a person has a disability! 😊



Facilitators Notes (Slide 11)

Greeting people isn't always about a handshake. Remember, as with anyone, make eye contact, smile, and talk to the person.



Visual Disabilities




- Identify yourself when you approach a person who is blind
- When you give directions, be specific and note obstacles;
- Offer assistance, but wait for direction
- Let the person know if you walk away



Facilitators Notes (Slide 12)

Remember a person who is blind or visually impaired will likely not be able to see you when you approach them. When you first speak with someone who is blind, identify yourself as an employee of the establishment. If they don't recognize that you are speaking to them, it is usually appropriate to touch the person lightly on the arm. Face the person and speak normally as this will help them to determine where you are standing in relation to them. When giving directions to someone who is blind or has low vision, remember to use distances and directional cues to help guide them, such as "walk about ten feet then turn left, go another three feet and you'll come to a set of eight steps..." etc. If someone looks like they need help, it's OK to offer assistance, but wait for them to tell you how you can help them. People with visual disabilities will vary in how they prefer to be assisted or guided. Some may prefer to take your arm and have you lead them, some may prefer you give them directions, some may prefer you walk along side them, etc. You are not expected to automatically know this, simply ask them and they will tell you. Remember, the person has no way of knowing if you walk away from them, so just let the person know as you leave.





True or False?

When speaking to a person who is blind, it is rude to use visual references, such as “Can you see my point?”



Facilitators Notes (Slide 13)

Pose this question to your audience. The answer is on the next slide.




FALSE

There are many meanings for the word “see.”
It can mean realize, understand, discover,
etc. A person who is blind can probably do
all of those things

**Facilitators Notes (Slide 14)**

In the larger sense, it is unnecessary to constantly be on guard about the use of common words around people with disabilities. This reserved hesitancy can falsely assume that the person with a disability is not only sensitive about any reference to lost or limited function, but also offended and/or saddened by them, which may not be true.



Hearing Disabilities


- Talk directly to the person, not an interpreter
- Before speaking, make sure you have his or her attention
- If the person is speech/lip reading, face the person, keep your hands and objects away from your mouth, and maintain eye contact
- If you do not understand the person's speech, ask that it be repeated or written down



Facilitators Guide (Slide 15)

This slide introduces some general rules around interacting with people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Some people may use ASL and communicate using an interpreter, others may lip read or wish to use written notes to communicate. Ask the person how they prefer to talk with you or follow their lead. If they have difficulty understanding you, offer to write the information down. It's important to look directly at the person (not their companion or an interpreter), and resist the urge to multi-task so that they can watch you speak. Unless you are asked to, do not raise your voice or shout. This can change the way that you form sounds and make it more difficult to lip read. Deafness or hearing loss sometimes affect speech as well, so you may find it difficult, at least at first, to understand some people with hearing disabilities. If you don't understand what a person with a hearing disability has said, ask him or her to repeat it, or try other methods, such as writing it down. Never pretend to understand when you do not.





Another Question!

When a person who is Deaf or hearing impaired asks you to repeat a statement, you should:

- A. Repeat the statement
- B. Repeat the statement in a louder voice
- C. Repeat the statement more slowly
- D. Rephrase the statement



Facilitators Notes (Slide 16)

Pose this question to your audience. The answer is on the next slide.



A. Repeat the statement

The most appropriate response is to repeat yourself — like you would with anyone!
But if you still have trouble, try other strategies.



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17



Facilitators Notes (Slide 17)

You can try rephrasing the statement, especially if there is a briefer or clearer way you can state your message. Some words are easier to lip read than others. If you are still unable to communicate effectively then you could try to write/type what you're saying.



Speech Disabilities

- Talk to a person with a speech disability as you would anyone else
- Be patient; it may take a little longer for the person to speak



Facilitators Notes (Slide 18)

Just because someone has a speech impairment does not mean they have an intellectual disability or impairment.



Another Question!

When listening to a person who has speech that is difficult to understand, you should:


- A. Tell the person you don't understand and ask him/her to repeat themselves
- B. Pretend to understand
- C. Make an excuse to end the conversation



Facilitators Notes (Slide 19)

Pose this question to your participants. The answer is on the next slide.




A. Tell the person you don't understand and ask that they repeat themselves

The most appropriate response is to let them know you don't understand and ask them to repeat themselves. People with speech impairments want to be understood like anyone else.

**Facilitators Notes (Slide 20)**

Be honest if you can't understand the person. Don't just nod your head or smile as if you understand when you don't — that doesn't help either of you and could simply compound the problem. Don't try to fill in words or finish sentences for him, either — it is disrespectful and can create frustration. Give the individual the time and attention he needs to communicate. The individual is probably used to dealing with others who have trouble understanding him, so follow his lead. If repetition doesn't work, the person (or you) might suggest other methods, such as writing notes.



“Hidden” or Non-obvious Disabilities

- Cognitive, intellectual, learning, psychiatric, etc.
 - May affect memory, attention span, sensory perception, ability to sort and understand information, etc.
- Health conditions (diabetes, HIV, heart conditions, cancer, etc.)
 - May affect a variety of functions



Facilitators Notes (Slide 21)

Any of your customers may have a disability that you can't see. Hidden disabilities present themselves in a lot of different ways. This is why consistently good customer service is so important in the service industry. Listen to what people need and to your best to help them in a way that is effective and respectful.



Assisting People with Hidden Disabilities

- Respect requests for assistance, even when you can't see why the person is asking for it
- Follow the person's lead
- Don't make assumptions



Facilitators Notes (Slide 22)

Don't assume that because a person "looks fine" he or she doesn't need assistance. People with all kinds of hidden disabilities may need some assistance to access goods and services in places of business.

People with cognitive, intellectual, psychiatric, or learning disabilities may need information repeated, rephrased, or broken down into smaller "bits." For example, if you are giving complicated directions break them down into steps or offer a map.

People with non-obvious health conditions that limit stamina, strength, or dexterity might request different types of assistance. For example, an individual might ask if he or she could sit down, rather than standing in a long line, and still be waited on "in turn."





Remember When

You were asked to think about customers
with disabilities . . .



Facilitators Notes (Slide 23)

At the beginning of this module, we asked you to think about the word, phrase or thought you had about providing services to people with disabilities. Without asking participants to reveal the word or phrase they thought of or wrote down, ask them if they would change it now? Ask participants if the exercise helped them to understand assumptions they made about serving people with disabilities.



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Facilitators Notes (Slide 24)

National Network: Please insert your centers contact information into this slide.

Conclude by reminding participants that the training materials were produced by the Northeast ADA Center in collaboration with the ADA National Network. Remind them of the free and confidential technical assistance and other services available from your local ADA Center and from the ADA Centers throughout the country.

