

# Inclusive Language & Disability Etiquette Guide

Give  
everyone  
a fair go



# Inclusive language

**Words matter.** It is important that the language you use is reflective of the disability community. If you need to ask questions relating to a person's disability, always be sure to ask them in a genuine and respectful way.

There are some terms that are no longer relevant, can cause offense or even reinforce negative stereotypes. It is important to use respectful, up to date language that reflects the social model of disability and highlights the organisation's inclusion of people with disability. The following tables give some examples of what is considered respectful and appropriate versus what is now out of date and derogatory.

<b>Avoid</b>	<b>Try</b>
Disabled, handicapped	Person with disability, people with disability
Mental, crazy, mad	Person with a mental health condition
Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user
Mentally retarded	Person with cognitive disability
Suffers from	Has disability
Simple, mentally disabled	Person with intellectual disability, person with psychosocial disability
Brain damaged	Person with a brain injury
Normal person	Person without disability
Disabled parking space	Accessible parking space
Disabled toilets	Accessible toilets



# Talking to people with disability

Talking to people with disability really is the same as talking to people without disability. To support you, some tips have been provided below regarding how to ensure you are being respectful and inclusive. Being positive, confident and genuine will get you most of the way to making everyone feel included. Here are some tips to make communication even more accessible.

## **What**

Get rid of outdated terms and deficit language

## **Why**

Subtle language changes can make a big difference. Avoid terms like 'special needs', 'differently abled', 'person of all abilities' or language that implies a person with disability is inspirational because of their disability.

## **What**

When in doubt use person-first language

## **Why**

'Person with disability' identifies the person rather than the disability. For example, use 'person who is blind instead' of 'blind person'. The disability community is diverse, and some people do prefer identity-first language, like 'I am Autistic' over 'I am a person with Autism'. The best thing you can do is listen and take their lead. It is okay to ask if you are unsure.

## **What**

Talk to a person directly

## **Why**

If a person with disability has an interpreter or support person, ensure you speak with the person with disability directly. The support person or interpreter are there for support only. The most important thing to do is be natural and speak in a normal tone.

## **What**

Have two-way conversations

## **Why**

Even if you are nervous about saying the wrong thing or causing offense to a person with disability, it is important to continue having a two-way conversation to build understanding and ensure everyone feels comfortable.



# Disability etiquette

The social model of disability acknowledges that a person's disability itself is not what hinders their participation and inclusion. Instead, it is the external barriers that impede their full engagement. By removing these barriers, individuals with disability can contribute and participate equally and with dignity, as valued members of our community. There are several barriers that can impede successful interactions. Find below some examples of disability etiquette that can improve interactions for people with disability.

**Communicating** – Use concrete and explicit language when speaking to all people, including people with disability. For example, avoid using idioms like “take a chair” as some people may take the literal meaning and pick up the chair. Instead ask “would you like to sit down?”.

**Body language** – Be aware of your body position in reference to the person you are engaging with. For example, when talking to a wheelchair user, it is best practice to ask them if they would prefer you bend down to their eye level. Some people prefer this, and some do not.

**Respecting personal equipment and belongings** – Assistive equipment can be viewed as an extension of self for their users, such as a wheelchair for a wheelchair user. Therefore, always ask before touching or moving a person’s belongings or equipment.

**Supporting a person who is blind or has low vision** – If a person is navigating an environment and you feel they require assistance, always verbally ask them prior to physically assisting them. Additionally, tell them that you are approaching them as they may not be aware.

**Interpreters** – If a person is using an Auslan interpreter, remember to look directly at the person with disability and not the interpreter when communicating. If the person is not using an Auslan interpreter, face them, as they may be able to lip read. Remember to talk normally and clearly and accompany any verbal instructions with clear physical directions. Offering alternative methods of communication such as pen and paper may also be useful.

**Communicating with a person with intellectual disability** – When communicating with a person with intellectual disability, it can be useful to use plain English, ask things in different ways and take time. Where possible, keep information to one key point per sentence and one question at a time.

**Communicating with a person who is nonverbal** – Asking how a person wishes to communicate is often the best place to start. Be aware that people who are nonverbal may use an alternate communication device such as an iPad, assistive technology, communication board or book or paper and pencil.