

**The Hampton Roads Diversity & Inclusion Consortium
Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities
3rd Annual Eastern Virginia Regional Diversity & Inclusion Conference
13 October 2016**

Guide for Working with Persons with Disabilities

Address persons with disabilities as a person first.

- You are addressing a person with a disability, a person who is blind or visually impaired, a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, a person who has multiple sclerosis, or cerebral palsy, a person with a seizure disorder, a person who uses a wheelchair, etc.
- When speaking to a person with a disability, speak to that person directly, not to their companion, if there is one.
- 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 hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.)
- Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending the same familiarity to all others.
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
- You can use common expressions such as “see you later” to a person who is blind, or “did you hear about that?” to a person who is deaf.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

Tips for Communicating with Individuals who are blind or visually impaired

- Remember, a blind person is a person who happens to be blind.
- Announce yourself, give your name, when entering a room or approaching a person who is blind.
- Before assisting a person who is blind, ask the person how you may best assist him or her. Be specific in giving directions
- Use a normal tone and speed of voice unless the person who is blind is also deaf.
- Speak to the individual directly, not a third party, when you approach him or her.
- If you don't remember or know the person's name, and you wish to speak to him/her, lightly touch the person on the arm to indicate that you are talking to him/her.
- State clearly who you are; speak in a normal tone of voice.

- When conversing in a group, remember to identify yourself and the person to whom you are speaking.
- Tell the individual when you are leaving.
- Do not attempt to lead the individual without first asking; allow the person to hold your arm and control her or his own movements.
- Be descriptive when giving directions; verbally give the person information that is visually obvious to individuals who can see. For example, if you are approaching steps, mention how many steps.
- If you are offering a seat, gently place the individual's hand on the back or arm of the chair so that the person can locate the seat.
- Be aware of any obstacles in the room and verbally direct the blind person or person with low vision to safety. Warn the person of steps, ramps, narrow spots, open doors and closets, projecting and overhead obstacles.
- Allow the person who is blind to take your arm and walk a half step behind to anticipate curbs and steps. Do not grab.
- When using stairs, describe the number of steps, landings, and anything unusual about them. Indicate the location of the handrail, but don't grab the person's hand.
- When handing objects to someone who is blind or visually impaired, tell him/her you are doing so and then place it in his/her hands.
- Feel free to use "see" and "look". Don't say, "Come feel this".
- Do not pet or make eye contact with a working guide dog – especially if it is wearing its harness. Always ask permission of the owner before interacting with the dog. Walk on the opposite side of the dog.
- The senses of smell, touch, and hearing may give a person who is visually impaired or blind more information.
- Avoid prying into the personal details of how someone went blind. Find a common interest and enjoy a good conversation.

Tips for Communicating with Individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing

- Gain the person's attention before starting a conversation (i.e., tap the person gently on the shoulder or arm).
- Look directly at the individual, face the light, speak clearly, in a normal tone of voice, and keep your hands away from your face. Use short, simple sentences. Avoid smoking or chewing gum.

- If the individual uses a sign language interpreter, speak directly to the person, not the interpreter.
- If you telephone an individual who is hard of hearing, let the phone ring longer than usual. Speak clearly and be prepared to repeat the reason for the call and who you are.
- If you do not have a Text Telephone (TTY), dial 711 to reach the national telecommunications relay service, which facilitates the call between you and an individual who uses a TTY.
- Prepare a printed sheet describing tasks, procedures, communication information, and emergency procedures.
- You may ask the person you are working if they would like to stand closer to you or another speaker at a meeting.

Tips for Communicating with Individuals with mobility impairments

- If possible, put yourself at the wheelchair user's eye level.
- Do not lean on a wheelchair or any other assistive device.
- Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.
- Do not assume the individual wants to be pushed — ask first.
- Offer assistance if the individual appears to be having difficulty opening a door.
- If you telephone the individual, allow the phone to ring longer than usual to allow extra time for the person to reach the telephone.
- If standing is an issue, have portable seating nearby.
- If a visitor is using a wheelchair or walker, ask if they would prefer being in the front of the group in meetings.

Tips for Communicating with Individuals with speech impairments

- If you do not understand something the individual says, do not pretend that you do. Ask the individual to repeat what he or she said and then repeat it back.
- Be patient. Take as much time as necessary.
- Try to ask questions that require only short answers or a nod of the head.
- Concentrate on what the individual is saying.
- Do not speak for the individual or attempt to finish her or his sentences.
- If you are having difficulty understanding the individual, consider writing as an alternative means of communicating, but ask the individual if this is acceptable.
- If a person with speech impairment offers to say something, or ask questions, be patient, and repeat the question or statement so everyone understands it, before replying.

Tips for Communicating with Individuals with cognitive disabilities

- If you are in a public area with many distractions, consider moving to a quiet or private location.
- Be prepared to repeat what you say, orally or in writing.
- Offer assistance completing forms or understanding written instructions and provide extra time for decision-making. Wait for the individual to accept the offer of assistance; do not "over-assist" or be patronizing.
- Be patient, flexible and supportive. Take time to understand the individual and make sure the individual understands you.
- Keep your conversation simple.
- Speak slowly.
- Ask the person if there are any questions.

What constitutes a Service Animal under the ADA?

As of September 15, 2010 the ADA identifies service animals as dogs and small horses that are trained. FHA regulations and Air Carrier Act have a different list of service animals. Title II and III entities must permit service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas where the public is allowed to go unless they might compromise a sterile environment.

- Service animals are working animals, not pets. The work or task a dog has been trained to provide must be directly related to the person's disability. Dogs whose sole function is to provide comfort or emotional support do not qualify as service animals under the ADA.
- Under the ADA, service animals must be harnessed, leashed, or tethered, unless these devices interfere with the service animal's work or the individual's disability prevents using these devices. In that case, the individual must maintain control of the animal through voice, signal, or other effective controls.
- The only two questions that can staff can ask are:
 - a. Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
 - b. What work or task has the dog been trained to perform.
- Staff cannot ask about the person's disability, require medical documentation, require a special identification card or training documentation for the dog, or ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.

- Allergies and fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people using service animals. When a person who is allergic to dog dander and a person who uses a service animal must spend time in the same room or facility, for example, they both should be accommodated by assigning them, if possible, to different locations within the in the facility.
- A person with a disability cannot be asked to remove his service animal from the premises unless: (1) the dog is out of control and the handler does not take effective action to control it or (2) the dog is not housebroken. When there is a legitimate reason to ask that a service animal be removed, staff must offer the person with the disability the opportunity to obtain goods or services without the animal's presence.
- People with disabilities who use service animals cannot be isolated from other patrons.
- Staff is not required to provide care or food for a service animal.

The ADA has a new, separate provision about **miniature horses** that have been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. Miniature horses generally range in height from 24 inches to 34 inches measured to the shoulders and generally weigh between 70 and 100 pounds. Entities covered by the ADA must modify their policies to permit miniature horses where reasonable. The regulations set out four assessment factors to assist entities in determining whether miniature horses can be accommodated in their facility. The assessment factors are:

- Whether the miniature horse is housebroken,
- Whether the miniature horse is under the owner's control,
- Whether the facility can accommodate the miniature horse's type, size, and weight; and
- Whether the miniature horse's presence will not compromise legitimate safety requirements necessary for safe operation of the facility.

DON'T LOOK AT THE DISABILITY – LOOK AT THE ABILITY!

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These etiquette tips were taken from:

-Office of Disability Employment Policy; the Media Project, Research and Training Center on Independent Living, - University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS;

-National Center for Access Unlimited, Chicago, IL.

-The Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind <http://www.guidedog.org/ProgServ/guidelsphb.htm>

Contact information: For ADA information – Department of Justice

800-514-0301 (voice) -58000383 (TTY) For Technical assistance on ADA Accessibility guidelines -(ADAAG) 800-872-2253 (voice) -8002822 (TTY)