

## LET'S GO TOGETHER!

**D**id you know that around 15 per cent of the world's population live with a disability? The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that an estimated one billion people live with disabilities and that persons with disabilities make up the world's largest minority group. Although The Bahamas' Department of Statistics recorded more than 10,000 persons with disabilities in the last census, if we use WHO's formula, then it means that approximately 35,000 to 45,000 persons in The Bahamas live with a disability.

The purpose of The Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2014, is to end all forms of discrimination against persons with disabilities. The Act defines a person with a disability as any individual with a long term disability including physical, mental, intellectual, developmental or sensory impairments and other health related illnesses which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Did you know that we can discriminate or offend persons with disabilities by the way we speak to them, or by the way we behave around or towards them? For example, to say to the companion of a person who is blind, "Ask him if he wants a drink", is discriminatory and offensive. The correct way is to simply speak directly to the person who is blind. This brochure provides some tips and helpful do's and don'ts for effectively interacting with persons with disabilities.

## IF YOU DON'T KNOW, ASK!

You don't have to feel awkward when dealing with a person who has a disability. This booklet provides some basic tips for you to follow. And if you are ever unsure about what to do or say with a person who has a disability, just ask them!

## USE PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE



Using people-first language means putting **the person before the disability**. People-first language is a way of speaking that emphasizes the person and not the disability. For too long people who happen to have disabilities have been subjected to language that devalues, dehumanizes, and marginalizes them. Phrases like "disabled person" or "handicapped person" are no longer acceptable. The correct, people-first phrase is, "person with a disability". Using people-first language communicates the idea of a disability as a secondary attribute, not a characteristic of a person's identity.

## DO'S & DON'TS

**DO SAY THIS:** Person with a disability or person with disabilities;

**DON'T SAY THIS:** Disabled person; crippled person; the handicapped; handicapped person;

**DO SAY THIS:** He has a disability; she has a condition of (spina bifida, etc.), or she was born without legs;

**DON'T SAY THIS:** Defective, defect, deformed. *These words are offensive, dehumanizing, degrading and stigmatizing.*

**DO SAY THIS:** He is a wheel-chair user; she uses a wheelchair; he walks with crutches;

**DON'T SAY THIS:** He is wheelchair bound; she is confined to a wheelchair; he is crippled; she is an invalid; *Most people who use a wheelchair or mobility devices do not regard them as confining. They are viewed as liberating; a means of getting around.*

**DO SAY THIS:** Deaf or hard of hearing. *Deafness refers to a person who has a total loss of hearing. Hard of hearing refers to a person who has a partial loss of hearing within a range from slight to severe.*

**DON'T SAY THIS:** Deaf and Dumb—*this is as bad as it sounds*. The inability to hear or speak does not indicate lack of intelligence.

**DO SAY THIS:** Person who has a mental, developmental, or intellectual disability. Or, he has a learning disability.

**DON'T SAY THIS:** She is retarded, stupid or an idiot. He is mental. *These labels are insensitive and offensive.*

**DO SAY THIS:** Person without disability; Able-bodied; able to walk, see, hear.

**DON'T SAY THIS:** Normal or healthy (example, "*He uses a wheelchair and his wife is normal*" or "*his wife is healthy*"). When used as the opposite of disabled, *normal* implies that the person with a disability is abnormal or is unhealthy. Many people with disabilities have excellent health.

**DO SAY THIS:** A person who has (name of disability); Example: A person who has cerebral palsy.

**DON'T SAY THIS:** Afflicted with, suffers from. *Most people with disabilities do not regard themselves as afflicted or suffering continually. A disability is not an affliction.*



Let's go  together!

## Basic Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities

✎ When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than through his or her companion or sign language interpreter.

✎ When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. Even people with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands.

✎ When meeting a person who is visually impaired, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.

✎ Always ask before you assist a person with a disability. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.

✎ Leaning on or hanging on to a person's wheelchair is considered annoying. The chair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.

✎ Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person.

✎ Invisible disabilities are disabilities that are not immediately apparent. Some people with visual or hearing disabilities who do not wear glasses or hearing aids, or people with chronic anxiety disorders or chronic fatigue syndrome may not appear to be obviously disabled.

*The key is to treat **everyone** you meet with the same respect, courtesy and dignity with which you would like to be treated.*

For more information on the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) 2014, Act, how it affects you and your business, and how you can help, please view a copy of the Act online at [www.bahamas.gov.bs/socialservices](http://www.bahamas.gov.bs/socialservices) You may also contact the Secretariat of The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities; we will be happy to answer your questions, arrange an onsite meeting with you, or provide disabilities-related training/orientation for your staff.



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**Protecting Rights**  
**Promoting Responsibility**  
**Ensuring Accessibility**  
**Advancing Equal Opportunities**

# DISABILITIES ETIQUETTE

*Tips and helpful do's and don'ts  
for interacting with  
People with Disabilities*



*Photo—Every Child Counts, Abaco*



**The National Commission  
for Persons with Disabilities**