

Disability Tips and Best Practices for Legislators and Staff

General Disability Etiquette Best Practices

- Every person with a disability is different and every interaction with a person with a disability will be different.
- Not every disability is visible.
- Speak to the person with the disability first and not the companion.
- Never assume that because the individual does not talk that she/he does not understand or that she/he is not smart.
- Communication should be concise, simple, clear, and jargon free.
- Refer to the person first, not the disability. For example, 'a woman who uses a wheelchair. not "a wheelchair-bound woman.'
- If a constituent looks as though he/she needs help, first ask if he or she would like assistance, then wait for specific instructions.
- Under the ADA, a service animal is a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability.
- According to the ADA, there are 2 questions you can ask regarding a service animal: 1) Is this a service animal? 2) What work or task has the dog been trained to do?
- The service animal is always working; do not interact with the animal.

Cognitive Disabilities

- Plan extra time for meetings to accommodate constituents with information processing difficulties.
- Allow pauses for the person to process what has been said and formulate a response.
- Provide constituents a written synopsis of what is discussed in the meeting

Visual Disabilities

- When approaching someone, introduce yourself; let a person know you want to shake his/her hand.

- Verbalize common body language and non-verbal communication. Say yes or no instead of shaking your head.
- Do not avoid words like “see” and “look” as part of common phrases. For example, “It is nice to see you.”

Hearing Disabilities

- Face a constituent during conversation so that he/she has an unobstructed view of your face and mouth.
- Speak at a normal volume and rate of speech.
- American Sign Language is not an exact translation of English; it has its own grammar rules and style.
- Speak directly to the person, not the interpreter.

Mobility Disabilities

- Maximize width and clear floor space within your office. If this is not possible, identify an alternative accessible meeting space.
- Mobility aides and devices, such as a wheelchair, are viewed as extensions of the person. Avoid touching the wheelchair; the wheelchair is considered his/her personal space.
- When communicating with a person in a wheelchair, find a way to be at eye level with her/him. Find a chair or seating for the conversation when possible.

If you would like further information, resources, and training, contact Bri Conley, Public Policy and Advocacy Manager, at 314 289-4304 or by email at bconley@paraquad.org.