

**Interacting with people who have disabilities might be a new experience for you. It may make you feel uncomfortable. It is common to feel this way at first. The more you get to know the person the less you'll think about the disability.**

**Listed are some suggestions on how to relate to and communicate with people who have disabilities.**

### **Speech Impairments**

Give 100% of your attention when talking to a person who has difficulty speaking. Be encouraging rather than correcting.

Be patient and don't try to speak for the person.

Ask short questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head.

If you still have difficulty understanding, offer a pen and paper.

### **Psychiatric Disorders**

Write information down for the person to read.

Speak in a calm, normal voice.

Try to keep the person focused on their task.

You may need to repeat information and explain things that seem obvious to you.

### **Hearing Impaired**

Get the person's attention before speaking. Call out the person's name, tap them on the shoulder, or wave.

Do not place anything in your mouth while speaking (pencil, gum, cigarettes, etc).

Speak slowly and clearly, do not exaggerate, or over pronounce. Exaggeration can distort lip movements.

Don't shout. This distorts your voice.

Use short sentences. They are easier to understand.

Look directly at the person when speaking. Avoid turning away.

### **If an interpreter is present:**

Maintain eye contact with the person who has the hearing impairment.

Speak to the person with the hearing impairment not the interpreter.

Use the words "I" and "you" when communicating with an interpreter, not "tell him".

### **Visual Impairments**

When offering assistance to a person with a visual impairment, allow the person to take your arm just above the elbow.

Greet a person with a severe loss of vision by touching their arm and identifying yourself and others who may be with you.

Be clear in giving directions, "The door is five steps ahead of you".

Keep doors open or closed a half-opened door is a hazard.

When helping a person with a severe loss of vision sit in a chair, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the chair.

### **Mobility Impairments**

When talking to a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, place yourself at the wheelchair user's eye level.

When giving directions consider distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs, and steep hills.

Leaning or hanging on a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person and is considered annoying.

Don't push the wheelchair unless asked.

Never move a person's crutches or cane out of their reach. If they are in the way, ask if you can put them under their chair.

Do not patronize a person in a wheelchair by patting them on the head.

### **Hidden Disabilities**

Hidden disabilities are physical or mental impairments that are not apparent to others. For example: heart disease, learning disabilities, diabetes, epilepsy, bipolar disorder, arthritis, attention deficit and allergies.

A person with heart disease might prefer to sit instead of stand.

For learning disabilities when giving a task, break task into smaller steps and give instructions in writing and verbally.

Give people with reading difficulties plenty of time to read and understand the text. Do not expect them to read aloud in public.

Be understanding. Disabilities are a medical condition and it should not be looked upon with shame.

## Terms to Avoid

When writing or speaking about a person with a disability always use the person first then the disability. For example say:

Person with a disability  
Not the disabled, invalid

Person who is hard of hearing  
Not the deaf

Avoid words and phrases that show negative perceptions. For example say:

Person who uses a wheelchair  
Not confined to a wheelchair

Physically disabled  
Not crippled, deformed

Avoid judgmental terms such as:  
Unfortunate, pitiful, deformed  
stricken with, disfigured

## In General

1. Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you say: "See you later" or "I've got to be running".
2. If you'd like to offer assistance to a person with a disability, wait until your offer is accepted before you help.
3. Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person with a disability to get things done or said.
4. Don't make people discuss their special needs in front of others.
5. Treat adults like adults.
6. Don't shout when talking to a person with a disability.
7. Do not use accessible parking.

## Federal Law

**Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**, prohibits job discrimination because of handicap

**Section 504**, prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of disability

Inquiries related to Section 504 should be directed to:

Employees: Sherry Kauppi, Affirmative Action Officer, Administration Bldg. Room 207, phone: 7-3310 or email:slkauppi@mtu.edu

Students: Gloria Melton, Assoc. Dean of Students, Administration Bldg. Room 176, phone: 7-2212 or email:gmelton@mtu.edu

**The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990**, protects qualified applicants and employees with disabilities from discrimination in hiring, promotion, discharge, pay, job training, fringe benefits, classification, referral, and other aspects of employment on the basis of disability.

## Michigan Law

### **Elliot-Larson Civil Rights Act of 1976**

Prohibits discrimination in employment, education, housing, public accommodation or public service based on religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, marital status, height, weight, arrest record, or handicap. Persons denied equal opportunity based on these conditions may file a complaint with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission.

**Michigan Tech ADA Statement:** Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA).

Michigan Technological University is an equal opportunity educational institution/equal opportunity employer and complies with the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

# Disabilities

## Some Common Courtesies for interacting with people who have disabilities