



Media Etiquette For Interviewing People With Disabilities

Using Words with Dignity

Rule of Thumb: Refer to the person first, and then address the disability. Emphasize the person and his or her strengths; do not define the person by his or her disability. People are not conditions, so do not label them with the name of the condition or as part of a disability group.

The following words have strong negative connotations and should not be used:	The following words are more affirmative and address people with dignity:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handicapped • Cripple • Victim • Invalid • Spastic • Patient (except in a hospital) • Wheelchair bound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with a disability • Person with a physical disability • Person who has (cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, etc.) • Person who uses a wheelchair • Person who uses (crutches, a cane, a mobility device, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental patient • Mental • Crazy • Insane 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with a mental illness • Person who has (depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, etc.) • Person with a psychiatric disability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retarded person • Retard • Mentally deficient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with mental retardation • Person with a developmental disability • Person with a cognitive disability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Down 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with Down Syndrome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deaf and dumb • Deaf mute • Mute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person who is deaf • Person with a hearing impairment • Person with a speech impairment • Person without speech
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brain damaged • Brain injury victim • Closed head injury victim 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with a traumatic brain injury • Person with a closed head injury
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Midget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person of short stature • Dwarf • Little person
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deformed • Birth defect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with a congenital disability



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- Speak directly to the person rather than through a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present.
- Offer to shake hands when introduced. People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands. When appropriate, offering the left hand is an acceptable greeting.
- Always identify yourself and others who may be with you when meeting someone with a visual disability.
When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen or ask for instructions.
- Treat adults as adults. Address people with disabilities by their first names only when extending that same familiarity to all others.
- Do not lean against or hang on someone's wheelchair. People with disabilities treat their chairs as extensions of their bodies.
The same rule applies to people with guide dogs and help dogs. Never distract work animals from their job without the owner's permission.
- Listen attentively when talking with people who have difficulty speaking and wait for them to finish. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers or a nod of the head.
Never pretend to understand; instead repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.
- Place yourself at eye level when speaking with someone in a wheelchair or on crutches. If a chair is available, sit down when speaking with someone in a wheelchair.
- When communicating with a person with a hearing impairment, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand to get his or her attention.
Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly, and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips.
If so, try to face the light source and keep hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking.
If a person is wearing a hearing aid, do not assume that they have the ability to discriminate your speaking voice. Never shout to a person. Just speak in a normal tone of voice.
- Relax. Do not be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions that seem to relate to a person's disability, such as "See you later" or "Gotta run." Those are common expressions in language and are not offensive.