

Volunteer Orientation

Module #2

Tell Me About...Disabilities at Gillette

Ask before you help

Don't assume someone needs help just because they have a disability.

Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it. Ask before you act.

Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to his companion.

Think before you speak

Respect his privacy. Patients may share information with you about their disability. Please listen and acknowledge their situation.

People who use Wheelchairs

- Have different disabilities and varying abilities.
- Some can use their arms and hands.
- Some can get out of their wheelchair and even walk for short distances.

People who use canes or crutches need their arms to balance themselves, so never grab the person

People who are Blind

A person may have a visual disability that is not obvious.

Be prepared to offer assistance – for example in reading – when asked.

Identify yourself before you make physical contact.

Tell him/her your name and your role.

People who are Blind

Don't touch the person's cane or guide dog. The dog is working and needs to concentrate. Walk on their side opposite their dog.

Their cane is part of their personal space. If they put the cane down, do not move it. Let them know if it is in the way.

People who are Deaf or Have Hearing Loss

They may use some hearing but may also rely on amplification and/or seeing the speaker's lips to communicate effectively.

Follow the person's cues to find out if they prefer sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking.

If you have trouble understanding them, let them know.

People who are Deaf or Have Hearing Loss

Before speaking to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, make sure you get their attention.

For simple interactions, writing back and forth is usually okay.

People who are Deaf or Have Hearing Loss

Don't shout. If they use a hearing aid your shout will sound distorted.

People who are deaf make and receive phone calls through a TTY or TDD (teletypewriter). This has a keyboard, screen and couplers for the phone receiver. One is available at the 4th floor Information Desk.

People with Speech Disabilities

A person who has had a stroke, is severely hard of hearing, uses a voice prosthesis or has a stammer or other type of speech disability may be difficult to understand.

A quiet environment makes communication easier.

People with Speech Disabilities

Give the person your full attention.

Don't interrupt or finish their sentences for them.

If you don't understand, don't nod. Ask them to repeat it. In most cases the person won't mind and will appreciate your effort to hear what they have to say.

Persons of Short Stature

There are 200 diagnosed types of growth-related disorders that can cause dwarfism and that result in the person being 4 feet 10 inches in height or less.

Communication is easier when people are at the same height. Kneel, stand back, or sit in a chair. Act natural and follow their lead.

People with Cerebral Palsy

As a result of injury to the central nervous system, people with cerebral palsy (CP) have difficulty controlling their muscles. Many people with CP have slurred speech and involuntary body movements.

People with Tourette Syndrome

People with Tourette Syndrome may make vocalizations or gestures such as tics that they cannot control.

A small percentage of people with Tourette syndrome involuntarily say ethnic slurs or obscene words.

If they make vocalizations during a conversation, wait for them to finish, then calmly continue talking.

Hidden Disabilities

Not all disabilities are apparent. A person may make a request or act in a way that seems strange to you. That behavior may be disability-related.

Even though these disabilities are hidden, they are very real. Respect their needs and requests whenever possible.

Epilepsy (Seizure Disorders)

Epilepsy is a neurological condition characterized by seizures that happen when the electrical system of the brain dysfunctions.

Beepers and strobe lights can trigger seizures in some people.

Epilepsy (Seizure Disorders)

Seizures may be convulsive, or the person may appear to be in a trance.

During complex partial seizures, the person may walk or make other movements while he is, in effect, unconscious.

Epilepsy (Seizure Disorders)

If a person has a seizure, you cannot do anything to stop it.

If they have fallen, be sure his head is protected and wait for the seizure to end.

Please alert staff if you witness this behavior.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and Respiratory Disabilities

People with MCS and respiratory disabilities such as asthma or emphysema react to toxins in the air.

Stale air, fumes from cleaning products, perfume, carpeting, air freshener can trigger a severe reaction.

Do not use fragranced body-care products like cologne, hair spray, hand lotion and after-shave.

Developmental Disabilities

People with developmental disabilities learn slowly. They have a hard time using what they have learned and applying it from one setting or situation to another.

Although they have certain limitations, most people with learning disabilities have average or above-average intelligence.

Developmental Disabilities

Speak in clear sentences, using simple words and concrete concepts.

Help them understand complex ideas by breaking them down into smaller parts.

Don't use baby-talk or talk down to people who have developmental disabilities.

People with Traumatic (or Acquired) Brain Injury

People with traumatic brain injury (TBI) have had damage to the brain usually as a result of trauma, such as an accident or stroke.

They may have a loss of muscle control or mobility that is not obvious.

People with Traumatic (or Acquired) Brain Injury

They may have poor impulse control. They may make inappropriate comments and may not understand social cues or “get” indications that they have offended someone.

May be unable to follow directions due to poor short-term memory or poor directional orientation.

Service Animals

Some people who are Deaf, blind or have low vision, or who have traumatic brain injury, seizure disorder, or a range of other disabilities may use a service animal to assist them with daily living.

Service Animals

Animals may not be always be identified as a service animal.

Service animals are usually highly trained and well behaved.

They are working, do not pet or distract them.

A Final Word

People with disabilities are individuals with families, jobs, hobbies, likes and dislikes, and problems and joys. While the disability is an integral part of who they are, it alone does not define them. Don't make them into disability heroes or victims. Treat them as individuals.