

Helping Disabled People

An essential publication for anyone who comes in contact with less able people.

MS
Multiple Sclerosis Society



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WHAT IS THIS BOOKLET ABOUT?

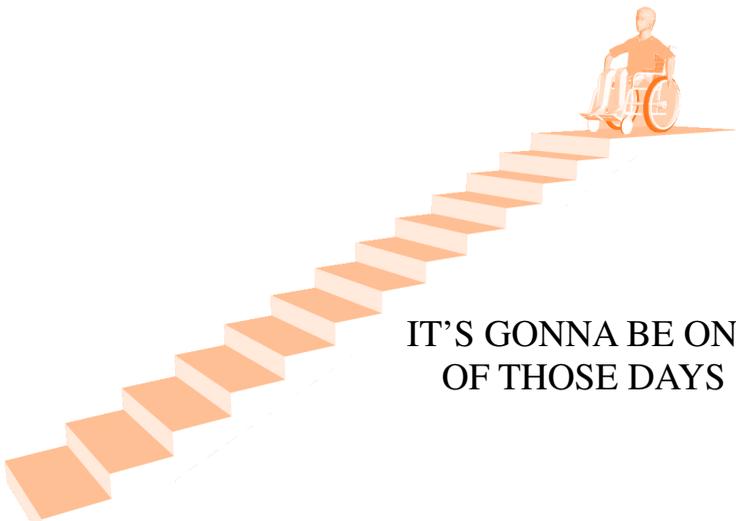
Whether it's in a social, commercial or emergency situation, if you know some simple guidelines, you will be more at ease with the situation and better able to help the disabled person and put them at their ease.

What is a disabled person?

Essentially someone that is, in some respect, less able to conduct day to day activities. Maybe they have been less able since birth or through an accident. They may have a debilitating illness that causes them problems

You will come in contact with disabled people.

There are in excess of ten million people in the UK who have one or more disabilities. They all strive to live as 'normal' a life as possible.



**IT'S GONNA BE ONE
OF THOSE DAYS**

Who will they be?

Anybody might become disabled so don't assume they are a race apart from you. They will be customers in your shop, travellers on your public transport, patients in hospitals and medical centres, spectators at sporting venues, holiday makers at the seaside. They can be anyone, but most of all they ARE people. It may not be obvious that someone has a disability. Can you tell that someone is hard of hearing from across the street? People sometimes have more than one disability.

Is life is getting easier for a disabled person?

It is illegal to discriminate against people including a disabled person. The Equality Act is in place to ensure equality for all and should be making life easier for everyone. Obvious signs of this are ramps and wider aisles for wheelchair users. However, if life is easier for disabled people, it often makes life easier for everyone: Mums with buggies and small children in tow for example.

Who should read this booklet

People who work in shops, supermarkets, sporting venues, doctors surgeries, hospitals, cinemas, restaurants, cafes, transport interchanges, town and city planning departments and the general public.

Remember, you will come in contact with disabled people. If you make life easier for them, you make it easier for yourself and everyone.

SIMPLE WAYS TO HELP

- Read the rest of this booklet.
- Treat everybody with the same respect as you would expect yourself.
- Don't presume someone has more or less ability than you.
- You may have to change the way you interact with someone. For example, facing someone to speak when you know they have hearing difficulties.
- Don't patronise the person
- Ask how best you can help them with their needs. Don't assume that you know best.
- If you are offering goods or services, try to offer them in the same way to a disabled person as you would anyone else.
- If the person is, for example, accompanied by a carer or someone else to offer support, speak to the disabled person without ignoring the carer. They will know more about their condition and needs and how you can best help them. (See page 7).
- Don't feel embarrassed or anxious. Relax and ask how you can help.
- Be patient. Give the person with a disability time to deal with the situation.
- Don't be too sensitive about use of certain words or phrases. "See you later" for example should not offend a partially sighted person.
- If you must refer to a persons disability, ask how they refer to it themselves.

You may feel that someone 'suffers from' their disability. They know that well enough, but prefer to live with the problem rather than suffer it.

PEOPLE WITH HEARING DIFFICULTIES



Not all “Deaf” people are unable to hear anything.

Rule one - Don’t shout.

There are degrees of hearing loss as well as distorted sound and tinnitus. Hearing loops help some people in public places but not all. Some people will use signing to communicate. Hearing aids won’t suit everybody and many combine what they can hear with lip-reading.

How can I help?

- Being able to see you is vital. Ensure that the person is aware that you are there before you start a conversation.
- If someone cannot hear what you say or understand you by other means, write it down.
- If the person uses an interpreter, speak to the person you wish to address and let the interpreter do their job.
- If there is a hearing loop, ensure that it works.
- Choose a quiet environment. Background noise makes life very difficult.
- Although it’s not a game of charades, hand gestures may help.
- If you do have to raise your voice, respect the persons privacy by moving to a more suitable area.
- Regularly make sure that what you have been saying has been understood.

PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY PROBLEMS

Rule one - Safety of the disabled person, and you, at all times.

Mobility problems range from stiff joints making movements difficult to being dependant on full body support in a wheelchair. The mobility aid used by a person is vital to their day to day life and should not be taken away or treated with less respect than the person themselves.

How can I help?

Where possible, when conversing with someone in a wheelchair lower your height so that you are on eye level. Try not to stand over someone - it can be intimidating.



If you are offering goods or services, make sure your premises are accessible. Low desks, ramps, wide aisles all help. Clear away clutter, this will make things easier for everyone. Ensure that your staff and colleagues are trained to help. If your business is with the person in the wheelchair, always speak to them not the carer. Ask how best you can help.

Heavy doors, deep pile carpets, loose gravel and door thresholds are just a few of the many obstacles that make life harder for wheelchair and scooter users. Ask how you can help. If you are not confident that you can cope with the situation, find someone to help you.

PEOPLE WITH STICKS, WALKING FRAMES OR CRUTCHES

Not all people with mobility problems are in a wheelchair.

How can I help?

Be aware that holding a walking aid uses your hands. Be patient when offering change in a shop for example. Ask how best you can make them comfortable. They may appreciate a seat or prefer to stand if their condition makes getting up and down difficult or painful.

Offer to help with bags, coats and shopping for example.

Offer to put the walking frames somewhere safe if the person is settled and comfortable.



MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

Almost one in four of us will have a mental health problem at some time. You will not always be aware that the person has a problem. The biggest barrier for people with mental health problems is the attitude of the people they come into contact with. Be prepared to ask if there is anything you can do to help support and provide for them. Many people in this situation will need an advocate to help them with appointments, accessing information services or day to day activities. Give people time to make decisions.

Avoid stressful environments such as inappropriate bright lighting or loud music. Repeat information as often as necessary but give plenty of time for the person to absorb the information and make a decision. Don't overload the person with un-necessary information – use clear, concise language. Keep calm. Don't shout.

PEOPLE WITH VISUAL PROBLEMS

Should your assistance be required, listed below are a few suggestions for you to consider;

- Introduce yourself quietly so as not to startle the person.
- When guiding them let them hold your arm (do not grasp hold of them). It is important not to encroach on their personal space.
- Make them aware of obstacles such as steps. Let them know whether they go up or down.
- Inform them that they are approaching narrow spaces, obstacles, and hazards.
- When approaching a chair and before they sit down place their hand on the back of the chair.
- When helping someone into a car, bus, train or aeroplane make them aware of the position of the chair by letting them feel where it is.
- Where possible position a person with any kind of disability in close proximity to an emergency exit.
- Do not move or tidy away any of their personal belongings without informing them.
- Supply information in a suitable format such as large print, Braille, audio disc, cassette or MP3.
- Don't walk away or leave without telling them.
- A Guide dog is a blind persons eyes as well as a pet and should be permitted to accompany them wherever they go.
- Do not feed, pat or make a fuss of a guide dog when it is working.
- Always make sure you ask the owner before making a fuss or patting a Guide dog.



PEOPLE WITH SPEECH DIFFICULTIES

People can have difficulties with speech and language for many reasons, therefore it is wrong to assume they have learning difficulties. You will need all your concentration to ensure you understand what is being communicated.

If you don't understand, don't 'best guess'; apologise and ask the person to repeat what they have said. If necessary, repeat what they have said and ask if it is correct.



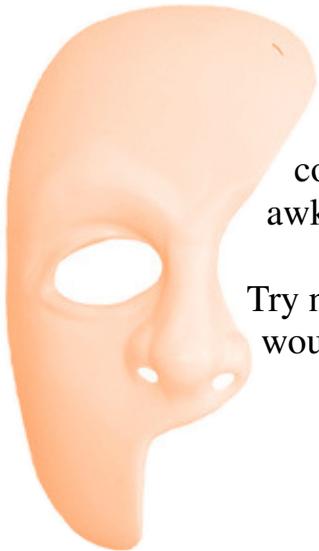
How can I help?

- Relax - behind the speech difficulty there is an interesting person.
- Don't be patronising - be patient.
- Don't be distracted from what is being said, by the way it is being said.
- Avoid the temptation to finish sentences for them.
- If you have to question the person, ask simple questions that require short answers.

PEOPLE WITH DISFIGUREMENTS

People can have disfigurements for many reasons. It could be present at birth or brought about by illness or accident. Social attitudes can create serious problems making life very challenging for them and their families. Anxiety in social situations, loss of confidence and self-esteem add to the challenge.

How can I help?



Relax and concentrate on the person, what they are saying and their personality. You will soon be more comfortable and thereby overcome your awkwardness.

Try not to stare. Treat the person as you would anyone else.

PEOPLE WITH READING AND WRITING DIFFICULTIES

People could have problems with reading and writing for many reasons. They may not speak much English, they could be dyslexic, have hand eye co-ordination problems or visual problems.

How can I help?



Allow extra time for them to read the information you offer.

Try to have printed matter available in other formats such as large font text, audio, braille or be prepared to read for them.

Some people might prefer to have someone else help them with forms or to take the form away to read or complete in their own time.

Ask the person how you could help and offer the solutions above as a choice.

Ensure that there is good lighting and that you have a magnifying glass to offer if required.

Some people may ask you to write for them, others may use a stencil or a stamp for their signature.

Be patient, allow the person time to read or complete a document.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR BUSINESS AND TRADES PEOPLE AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

Talking to disabled people using a telephone.

Treat all contacts the same, able-bodied as well as disabled. Concentrate on the content of the call, not the sound of the voice.

Repeat or rephrase your statements as required.

Give the caller time, don't finish sentences for them and don't interrupt.

Ask the caller to repeat anything you have not understood.

If you are not able to fully understand, apologise and suggest an alternative method of communication. Writing, text phone or email for example.

Providing a service for disabled people in their own homes.

Try not to 'turn up' unexpectedly.

If required, visit when a family member or carer can be there.

Allow people time to answer the door.

Make clear who you are, what you are there for and what you will do. Have identification ready.

Make sure the person understands what you are doing and keep them informed on your progress.

If you need to follow up your visit for any reason, make it clear when this will be.

If you are installing anything for the person, ensure that they understand what it does, how it works and that it is installed in such a way that it can be operated taking into account their limitations.

Don't move anything without asking.

Peoples homes are arranged to suit their requirements. If you do move anything, put it back where it was.

Appointments with disabled people.

Be prepared in advance of the appointment. If there is anything you need from the person or their carers, let them know in advance. Before the appointment, ascertain if there is anything the person needs from you at the appointment. Don't quiz the person about their disability unless relevant to the appointment. Don't assume that



you know the persons limitations. They may be able to do much more than you think. If the person with a disability is your client, talk and listen to them, not a carer or third party. Be open to the person's use of aids in the appointment such as a computer or having an interpreter to help them communicate. Provide any information you leave with them in a suitable format.

DISABILITY AND HOW IT AFFECTS THE COMMUNITY.

Of 1,000 disabled people surveyed, half considered a positive attitude from staff as having the most influence on improving their experience of accessing goods and services. ***

Of nearly 1,000 blind and visually impaired people sampled, 55% required help in finding a seat in the waiting area in GP surgeries, yet only 26% received it.

A quarter of deaf and hard of hearing people said they have missed an appointment because of poor communication – such as not being able to hear staff calling out their name. One in five have missed more than one appointment.

A recent UK survey showed :

The top three areas of complaint from disabled people were with respect to retail shopping followed by health services and transport.

As the country's population get older, more and more people become less able to cope in some respect. Arthritic joints, weak hands, declining senses and so on mean that people are less able, but not disabled in the normally recognised sense. Making life easier for disabled people makes life easier for everyone.

*** The area which would most improve the experience of disabled people in accessing goods and services would cost
..... **nothing**

TIPS FOR PEOPLE IN TRADE, COMMERCE & SOCIAL CARE SERVICES.

People with a disability make up a very significant percentage of the spending population. If treated well, they are very loyal customers and are quick to recommend good value, service and facilities.

It is not always possible to accommodate people with all disabilities. However, try to make their shopping experience as successful as possible and treat them the way you treat all customers.

Strive to achieve a good standard of awareness of peoples needs as outlined in the first part of this booklet. Try and reach the highest standard of accessibility possible within the constraints of your premises. Look at what the best shops and stores are doing and aim to match them.

AIMS FOR BUSINESS AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Staff awareness of the contents of this booklet.

Wheel chair access without obstacles.

Suitable car parking.

Where you have changing rooms, make sure they are useable to all.

Tills and counters at a suitable height for people in wheelchairs.

If someone needs to write something or fill in forms, a suitable surface to use should be provided.

Necessary information to be in a suitable format. Large print for example.

If someone has to wait for service or appointments, suitable places to wait with seating should be available as should quiet areas away from too much music or background noise where customers may discuss their needs.

Extra/double appointment times if necessary.

Suitable lighting for persons with visual problems.

Staff prepared to help with carrying shopping.

Simple and clear signage at a suitable height.

Give the person the time they need to make their purchases.

**Remember, patience, tolerance,
Empathy.**

Useful contact numbers

RNIB (Visual problems)	0303 123 9999
Action on hearing (Was RNID)	0808 808 0123
Carers UK	020 7378 4999
Alzheimer's Society	0845 300 0336
MIND (Mental Health advice)	0300 123 3393
Motor Neurone Disease	08457 62 62 62
Muscular Dystrophy	0800 652 6352
Parkinson's UK	0808 800 0303
The Stroke Association	0303 3033 100

For employers

When a person with a disability is applying for jobs, they should look out for employers using the disability symbol. It shows they have a positive attitude towards job applications from disabled people.



About the disability symbol

The disability symbol is made up of two ticks and the words 'positive about disabled people'. You will see the symbol displayed on job adverts and application forms.

If an employer uses this symbol, it means they are positive about employing disabled people and will be keen to know about your abilities.

The symbol is awarded by Jobcentre Plus to employers who have made commitments to employ, keep and develop the abilities of disabled staff.

This publication is aimed firmly at everybody. It has been put together by a group of volunteers from a disability group attached to the NHS on the Isle of Wight.

Input has come from many years of experience in most types of disability.

It aims to cover all the main (and obvious) points that would be useful in every walk of life.

It does not pretend to be the ultimate authority on disability but hopefully it goes a long way to inform people on the best ways to Help Disabled People

The most useful way to help someone less able than you is to do what they want you to do.

**Ask,
“HOW CAN I BEST HELP YOU?”**

