

**Parenting Way, Inc.** dedicates itself to greater inclusion of people with disabilities and continuing improvement of services, success will turn in part on courteous communication. We assure that those we serve and those who participate in our services and activities are individuals. Our clients and stakeholders come with diverse and varied abilities, needs, interests, preferences and personalities. Staff, Board, Volunteers and Interns are trained in the following principles that address the National Accountability for American with Disabilities Act. (ADA)

“Disability etiquette” is based on respect and common courtesy. Generally you should listen, be welcoming and learn from people with disabilities. The best way to know how best to interact with and accommodate individuals with disabilities is simply to ask them. For example, you could say, “What can we do to make our place more accessible for you?” or “Will you need any accommodations when you come in such as large print?” Don’t refer to accommodations, assistance or people as “special.”

Be sure to speak directly to the individual, not to a companion, assistant or interpreter who may be present. Don’t refer to a person’s disability unless it is relevant to the conversation. Always use “person first” language: “A woman who is blind,” not “a blind woman.” Avoid negative or outdated terms. For example, say, “a person who uses a wheelchair,” not “a wheelchair-bound person” or “a person confined to a wheelchair.”

### **People who have mobility disabilities**

When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair, you should try to be at his or her eye level by sitting or otherwise positioning yourself at the other person’s height. Never lean on an individual’s wheelchair or other device. Offer assistance and wait for permission before “helping.” This is true for: >> Pushing a wheelchair. >> Opening doors (unless you would naturally open the door in other circumstances). >> Providing a chair for someone who may have difficulty standing for long periods. >> Assisting a person who uses crutches, a walker or other devices with coats, bags or other items.

### **Hard of Hearing**

Gain the person’s attention before starting a conversation. For example, tap his or her shoulder. Look directly at the person, not an interpreter. Face the light, speak clearly and in a normal tone of voice (unless you are asked to speak more loudly), and keep your hands away from your face. If no interpreter is present, ask if it would be helpful to get an interpreter or to communicate in writing or with a computer terminal. Keep in mind that written communication may not be appropriate or useful for some people and is not effective for complex situations.

### **People who are blind or have low vision**

Speak to the individual when you approach, and state clearly who you are. Talk naturally and directly, without shouting. Do not start to lead a person who is blind without asking. If he or she wants the assistance, the person may want to hold your arm and control his or her own movements. Remember that a service animal is not a pet. Never touch, pet, distract or feed a service dog without first asking the owner. Tell the person when you are leaving.

### **People who have speech disabilities**

Be prepared to spend a little extra time to understand what the person is saying. Listen carefully. Repeat what you think you understand and ask for clarification of what you don’t understand. If you don’t understand something, don’t pretend that you do, and don’t complete the person’s thoughts or sentences on your own. Ask questions, preferably those that can be answered with brief responses or nodding of the head. If you’re having trouble communicating, consider using writing or a computer terminal, but only if the individual agrees that it would be useful.

### **People with cognitive disabilities**

Use short sentences and concrete, simple words. Offer assistance with and extra time for completing forms, understanding instructions or making decisions. But don’t “over-assist” or be patronizing. Be patient, flexible and supportive. You may need to allow some extra time for the person to process what you’re saying and respond. Consider moving to a quieter or more private location if you are in an area with many distractions.

### **People with psychiatric disabilities**

Provide information with respectful, clear, calm language and tone. If a person is confused, don’t give multiple directions or ask multiple questions. Ask or state one thing at a time. Be empathetic and reassuring. Show that you have heard the person and care about what they have told you. If the person becomes agitated, help him or her find a quiet corner away from the confusion. Don’t talk down to the person, and don’t yell or shout. Have a forward-leaning body position, which shows interest and concern.