

# Working Together For Equality

## Disability Language & Etiquette

It is fundamental to people with disabilities that disability is recognised as an equality issue. Do not let yourself be a barrier to disability equality



**MINISTRY OF EQUALITY**

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HM Government of Gibraltar

**“Gibraltar; everybody different,  
everybody equal”**

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Note to readers:

The typeface, font (Arial 14) and left justification applied in this booklet has been used in order for the content to be more legible to all readers. In addition, this booklet has been printed on matt paper in order to reduce reflective surfaces. This booklet is also available electronically.

## **Introduction**

The most difficult barrier faced by people with disabilities can be other people's attitudes. Insignificant details of behaviour and language can be offensive and engaging the support of people on the appropriate language and behaviour is an integral part of the Ministry of Equality's message. We hope that the community will help us in this task.

The content of this booklet is a result of consultation with the Gibraltar Disability Society. Most of the information will be common sense and courtesy and we welcome your support in helping us to break down barriers and shifting people's perceptions of disability.

## **Language**

### **Why Appropriate Language**

Everyone is affected by depreciatory language and misconceptions. Sincere respect and equality are easily recognised and beneficial to all.

## Everyday Phrases

There is no need to be self-conscious about using everyday phrases. Most people with disabilities are comfortable with everyday phrases and words used to describe daily living. Some people who use wheelchairs will themselves state “I am going for a walk” and, some visually impaired people will say “I will see you later”. Using everyday phrases of this kind are most likely not to cause any offence.

## Collective Terms and Labels

The word ‘disabled’ is a description, not a group of people. Use ‘person with a disability’ or ‘persons with disabilities’ not ‘the disabled’ or ‘disabled people’ as a collective term. However, many deaf people whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL) consider themselves part of the deaf community and, so they describe themselves as ‘Deaf’, with a capital D to emphasise their deaf identity.

Medical labels should be avoided. They say little about people as individuals and tend to reinforce stereotypes of people with disabilities as ‘patients’ or unwell. Phrases such as ‘suffers from’ which suggest discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness should also be avoided.

<b><u>Inappropriate Language</u></b>	<b><u>Appropriate Language</u></b>
The disabled	Person with a disability
Disabled people	People with disabilities
Disabled children	Children with disabilities
Severely disabled	Requires substantial or significant personal help
Suffers from	Living with
Mental illness/ mental health problems	Living with a mental health problem

<b><u>Inappropriate Language</u></b>	<b><u>Appropriate Language</u></b>
Handicapped	People with learning and/or physical disabilities
The deaf	People who are Deaf /People who are hard of hearing
The blind	People who are partially sighted or people who are visually impaired
Care	Personal help / personal support
Carers	Family members, relatives and friends
Carers (meaning paid home carers)	Personal assistants

<b><u>Inappropriate Language</u></b>	<b><u>Appropriate Language</u></b>
Special needs	State specific requirements
Disabled toilet	Accessible toilet or toilet accessible to people with disabilities
Disabled parking	Accessible parking
Wheelchair accessible	Accessible to wheelchair
Wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair or wheelchair user

While terminology is important in shaping viewpoints, attitudes are even more important. Most people with disabilities are less offended by occasional outdated terminology than by obvious paternalistic or patronizing attitudes.

# Etiquette

## Common Courtesies

- Do not make assumptions about an individual's ability to do certain things. People with disabilities develop their own methods of dealing with everyday issues.
- Do not assume that just because an impairment is not visible, it does not exist. Remember that anybody may have a hidden impairment and the majority of people with disabilities do not use wheelchairs.
- Treat people with disabilities as you would treat any other person i.e. as a woman, as a man, as a parent, as a working colleague. If an individual needs time to do things, be patient.
- Do not use behaviour more appropriate for dealing with children, for example literally or figuratively patting a person who uses a wheelchair on the head.

- Do not assume that an offer of assistance will automatically be welcome. Wait until your offer is accepted. Even then do not assume you know the best way of helping. Instead listen to any instructions you are given by the expert. (The one who receives the assistance).
- Speak normally and stand in front to allow eye contact to be made in the same way you would when talking to anyone else. Do not talk down or patronise.
- Speak directly to a person with a disability, even if they have an interpreter or companion with them.
- Never attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to.
- When making contact, whether verbal or physical, respect boundaries and personal space.

- Remember that a wheelchair is part of personal space.

## Meeting People who are Hearing Impaired

- Do not make assumptions about a person's ability to communicate or the way in which they do so.
- If they lip read, remember the skill is never wholly reliable and requires intense concentration.
- Look at the person directly and speak slowly and clearly but there is no need to shout or exaggerate.
- Use facial expressions, gesture and body movements with care to emphasize the words.
- Face the light and keep hands, food and cigarettes away from the face when speaking.

- With a light touch on their shoulder or a wave of hands you can attract the person's attention.
- If a sign language interpreter is present, remember to speak to the person you are meeting rather than the interpreter.
- Should there be difficulties in communicating, written notes or smart phone note pads can be used.

### Meeting People with Visual Impairments

- Identify yourself first of all and introduce anyone else who is present and, where he/she is placed in the room.
- Ask the person if they require any assistance and, if so how best this should be provided. Sometimes the offer may be accompanied by saying "let me offer you an arm". This will allow you to guide rather than propel the person.

- When offering a handshake, say something to indicate that you wish to shake hands.
  
- When meeting someone out of their home or working environment, ask what central point they are familiar with and arrange to meet there. Please ensure you arrive at the time agreed.
  
- When offering a seat, speak to the person through the chair process (chair on the right, left, back of you) and place the person's hand on the back or arm of the chair, so that they are aware of the position of it.
  
- At the end of the conversation do not just leave; say when you wish to end the conversation or move away.
  
- Always talk to the visually impaired person and not to his/her personal assistant or assistance dog.
  
- Remember, do not pet assistance dogs – they are working.

- Some people with disabilities have dual impairment, being both blind and deaf. Make yourself known to them by touching their sleeve gently and then wait until they have indicated the type of help they require.
- If in a noisy place, speak louder and directly towards the person who is visually impaired. However, generally, there is no need to use a raised voice.
- Always say what you want, as gestures are a useless communication tool to most visually impaired people.

### Meeting People with Mobility Impairments

- When talking with a person who uses a wheelchair, get a chair to sit down or ask them if they prefer you to stand or crouch. Do not tower over them so they get a stiff neck. Stand a little away so that you can have a conversation on an equal basis.

- When visiting your building or organisation, ensure that the person with disabilities has clear information about access restrictions. If it is not accessible, give the person a choice of a home visit or meeting elsewhere.
- Ask a person with disabilities if they need help rather than ignoring them or charging in.
- If access to your building is not obvious or difficult, meet the person with disabilities at the entrance to give assistance if required.
- A wheelchair is part of the body space of the person using it. Do not lean on it unless you would usually lean on the person themselves.
- If you wish to speak to the person who is with the wheelchair user (assuming this is not private) take up a position so that the person who uses the wheelchair, who may be unable to turn, can also join in the conversation.

- In public places or offices, ensure that items are not left lying around on the floor. Make sure that there are adequate spaces for people to get around and that access is safe for everyone.

## Meeting People with Speech Impairments

- Make eye contact, be attentive and patient with the person who has difficulty speaking or uses a communicator. Wait quietly and listen whilst the person talks.
- Resist the temptation to speak for the person or to finish their sentence.
- Some people may prefer to be asked questions where a reply only requires a nod or shake of the head or a short sentence.
- Be sure you understand fully what the person is meaning before making any assumptions. It may therefore be helpful to say what you have understood and ask the person to repeat the rest.

- If you do not understand what is being said, do not be afraid to ask the person to repeat it – maybe several times.

## Meeting People with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) with or without Associated Learning Disabilities

Autism is primarily a social and communication disorder, because of this, many of the needs are similar to those of people with speech impairments. Some ASD people are verbal, some are not.

In addition:

- The person with ASD may not be aware of social boundaries and/or body language.
- Some people with ASD are uncomfortable and intimidated if receiving or making direct eye contact.

- The person may not respect your own personal boundaries and there may be a need to correct them kindly, but firmly.
- Some do not like to be touched; it may be very uncomfortable or distressing. Please ask first.
- Many are sensitive to sound, so if it is noisy offer to move to a quieter area.
- The person may be very literal in their verbal understanding; it is therefore advisable to always be clear and unambiguous when giving instructions or information.
- Some may prefer to be asked questions where a reply only requires a short reply, a nod or shake of head.
- Some people with ASD who have no speech may use a form of sign language; they may however understand verbal interaction. Do not make assumptions about intellect just because the person may have communication difficulties.

- Minimise facial expressions, gestures and exaggerated body language.
- Do not rush the person, have patience and respect for what the person may say.
- Ask politely if things have been understood and reinforce information or instructions by asking them to repeat them back if able to do so.

## **Support Workers**

People with disabilities may be supported by personal assistants (PAs), other workers or assistance dogs (support dogs/guide dogs/hearing dogs).

Personal assistants may provide practical and personal support at home, within a working or academic or social/cultural environment. Support workers include:

- Sign language interpreters using British Sign Language (BSL) to convey speech to Deaf people.
- Lip speakers conveying speech to deaf lip readers using unvoiced speech.
- Academic supporters interpreting unclear speech.
- Assistance dogs including Guide Dogs, but also Hearing Dogs and Support Dogs.

### Tips when working with Support Workers & Assistance Dogs

- Do not ask PAs questions about the person with disabilities they work for, ask the person with the disability.
- Do look at the person with disabilities when you are speaking and even if they are using an interpreter or communication support worker.

- Do not pet assistance dogs; they are working.

Remember to treat support workers and dogs with courtesy and respect. They all, including dogs, may need somewhere to sit, something to eat and/or drink, go to the toilet and take a break.

## Notes



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