

Working Together For Equality

Welcoming Customers with Disabilities

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

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 legible to more readers. In addition, this booklet has been printed on matt paper in order to reduce reflective surfaces. This booklet is also available electronically.

Introduction

Treating all the people who come to your premises with individual respect and courtesy is at the heart of excellent customer service.

Customers with disabilities have the same preferences, perceptions, attitudes, habits and needs as customers without disabilities, and they are looking for the same quality of products and services.

This booklet sets out the main areas regarding the welcoming and communicating with customers with disabilities.

Understanding Disabilities

There are many kinds of disabilities; they can be visible or hidden.

Disabilities vary. Being hard of hearing is different from being Deaf. Having low vision is different from being legally blind. A disability can happen to anyone at anytime. Some people are born with a disability. For others, the disability results from an illness or an accident.

Language

There are not many situations in a customer service environment where you will have to refer directly to a person's disability. However, if you do, bear in mind that certain words and phrases may offend.

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 using 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 like these 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 described 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 suggesting discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness such as 'suffers from' should also be avoided.

The following words and phrases will help you choose language that is neither demeaning nor hurtful.

<u>Instead of</u>	<u>Please use</u>
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
Handicapped	People with learning and/or physical disabilities

<u>Instead of</u>	<u>Please use</u>
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 friend
Carers (meaning paid home carers)	Personal assistants
Special needs	State specific requirements

<u>Instead of</u>	<u>Please use</u>
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 offended less by occasional outdated terminology than by obvious 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 receiving the assistance).
- Speak normally and stand in front to allow eye contact to be 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, verbal or physical, respect boundaries and personal space.
- Remember that a wheelchair is part of personal space.

Customers with Visual Impairments

Some people with visual impairments can see nothing at all; others may have some sight but it may be blurred, limited or distorted.

- Identify yourself first then introduce anyone else who is present and, where he/she is located within 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 work 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, for example saying that the chair is on the right, left, or behind 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 may have more than one impairment for example, 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.
- Allow time for the customer to identify the correct coins / bills. Count the change out loud and make sure the customer receives it.
- When giving out the receipt and change, it is a good idea to comment each particular step you are doing. “ I will give you back £1.70, this is £1 (the person takes it) this is 50 pence (the person takes it) this is 20 pence (the person takes it).
- If written materials are provided, consider providing the material in a suitable alternative format such as electronically, large print, audio or Braille.

Customers with Hearing Impairments

There are many different degrees and types of deafness and different ways for who are Deaf or hard of hearing to communicate. Some may use Sign Language and may have an interpreter with them but many rely on lip reading and hearing aids.

- 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 consider written notes or smart phone note pads.

Customers with Mobility Impairments

Keeping aisles and floor space free from obstacles will highly assist the navigation within premises for people who use a wheelchair and for people who have difficulty walking.

- When visiting your premises, 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.

- If access to your building is not obvious or difficult, meet the person with disabilities at the entrance to give assistance if required.
- 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.
- A wheelchair is part of the body space of the person using it. Do not lean on it.
- If you wish to speak to the person who is with the wheelchair user, take up a position so that the person who uses the wheelchair, who may be unable to turn, can also join in the conversation.

- People who use walking aids may find difficulty in using their hands when standing. Offer a seat if you can, offer to open doors and pick up items.

Customers with Speech Impairments

Communication problems may be because of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words. It may also cause slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

- 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

Customer with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (A.S.D.) with or without Associated Learning Disabilities

Autism is primarily a social and communication disorder. Some A.S.D. people are verbal, some are not. In addition:

- The person with A.S.D. may not be aware of social boundaries and/or body language.

- The person may not respect your own personal boundaries and there may be a need to correct them kindly, but firmly.
- Some are uncomfortable and intimidated if receiving or making direct eye contact.
- 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 always advisable to be clear and unambiguous when giving instructions or information. For example: “Please take a seat” would be interpreted as picking up the seat. Instead, say, “Please sit down”.
- Some may prefer being asked questions where a reply only requires a short reply, a nod or shake of head.

- Some people with A.S.D. 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 not been understood and reinforce information or instructions by asking them to repeat them back if able to do so.

Customers with Facial Disfigurements

Some people are born with a disfigurement and others may acquire it through accident or illness. Mainly because of social attitudes, living with a facial disfigurement can be a challenge for the person and

their family.

If you focus on the person and what they are saying, you will soon overcome any possible awkwardness.

- Make contact as you would with any other customer.
- Concentrate on what they are saying and respond accordingly.
- Smile if you would for anyone else.
- Do not let the person's appearance distract you.

Customers with Disabilities over the Telephone

Customers with disabilities are the same as customers without disabilities. Common sense and common courtesy will help you to know what to do and say.

- Do not worry about how their voice sounds. Concentrate on what is being said.

Speak normally, clearly and directly.

- Be patient, do not interrupt or finish the customer's sentence. Give them time to explain themselves.
- Do not try to guess what they are saying. If you do not understand, do not pretend. Just ask again.
- If you are not certain what was said, just repeat or rephrase what you have heard.
- If the customer is having great difficulty communicating, arrange to call back when it is convenient to speak to someone else who may assist.
- If a telephone customer is using an interpreter or a T.T.Y. (Text Telephone) line, just speak normally to the customer, not to the interpreter.

A T.T.Y. is a special device that lets people who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech-impaired use the

telephone to communicate, by allowing them to type messages back and forth to one another instead of talking and listening.

Support Workers

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.

- Assistance dogs including Guide Dogs but also Hearing Dogs and Support Dogs.

Tips when working with Personal Assistants (PAs) & 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 PAs and assistance 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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