



## DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY HEADQUARTERS' INFORMATION ON:

### Disability Etiquette

People with disabilities are people first. They are not their conditions or diseases. Lack of awareness about disabilities can lead to unintended stereotypes and discrimination. How we view and communicate with and about people with disabilities shape our relationships.

This guiding principle is as true in American Indian and Alaska Native communities as it is in the general population. American Indian and Alaska Native people with disabilities want to be dealt with as people.

How we refer to people with disabilities in our communication is important.

- *For example*, a person is not an epileptic but rather a person who has epilepsy. In any reference, article, announcement, or advertisement, “people with disabilities” is the appropriate and preferred initial reference. Subsequent references can use the terms “person with a disability” or “individuals with disabilities” for grammatical or narrative reasons.
- *See the Glossary of Acceptable Terms* below for a complete listing of acceptable terms and appropriate applications.

This section contains information and awareness-building resources to assist in developing effective and respectful communication practices within our Native communities. This resource can be particularly useful to new program staff who has not worked in the area of disabilities before and to help orient tribal leaders and other community program staff who want to better understand how to work effectively for people with disabilities in tribal communities.

**Source:** The AI/AN consumers who served on the Technical Expert Panel that designed this Toolkit believed very strongly that a brief guide was needed to help tribal programs and tribal leaders understand fundamental dos and don'ts regarding people with disabilities.

### Dos and Don'ts

- **Do** learn where to find and recruit people with disabilities.
- **Do** learn how to communicate with people who have disabilities.
- **Do** ensure that your applications and other company forms do not ask disability-related questions and that they are in formats that are accessible to all persons with disabilities.
- **Do** have written job descriptions that identify the essential functions of each job.
- **Do** ensure that requirements for medical examinations comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- **Do** relax and make the applicant feel comfortable.
- **Do** provide reasonable accommodations that the qualified applicant will need to compete for the job.
- **Do** treat an individual with a disability the same way you would treat any applicant or employee—with dignity and respect.

- **Do** know that among those protected by ADA are qualified individuals who have AIDS or cancer or who are mentally retarded, traumatically brain-injured, deaf, blind, or learning disabled.
- **Do** understand that access includes not only providing environmental access, but also making forms accessible to people with visual or cognitive disabilities and making alarms and signals accessible to people with hearing disabilities.
- **Do** develop procedures for maintaining and protecting confidential medical records.
- **Do** train supervisors on making reasonable accommodations.
  
- **Don't** assume that persons with disabilities do not want to work.
- **Don't** assume that alcoholism and drug abuse are not real disabilities, or that recovering drug abusers are not covered by ADA.
- **Don't** ask if a person has a disability during an employment interview.
- **Don't** assume that certain jobs are more suited to persons with disabilities.
- **Don't** hire a person with a disability if that person is at significant risk of substantial harm to the health and safety of the public and there is no reasonable accommodation to reduce the risk or harm.
  - Do not make this decision yourself.
  - Consult with an attorney or personnel director when making such a determination.
  - Your assumptions about a disability may be incorrect or unfounded.
- **Don't** hire a person with a disability who is not qualified to perform the essential functions of the job even with a reasonable accommodation.
- **Don't** assume that you have to retain an unqualified employee with a disability.
- **Don't** assume that your current management will need special training to learn how to work with people with disabilities.
- **Don't** assume that the cost of accident insurance will increase as a result of hiring a person with a disability.
- **Don't** assume that the work environment will be unsafe if an employee has a disability.
- **Don't** assume that reasonable accommodations are expensive.
- **Don't** speculate or try to imagine how you would perform a specific job if you had the applicant's disability.
- **Don't** assume that you don't have any jobs that a person with a disability can do.
- **Don't** assume that your work place is accessible.
- **Don't** make medical judgments.
- **Don't** assume that a person with a disability can't do a job because of apparent or non-apparent disabilities.

## Conversation Etiquette

**When talking to a person with a disability**, look at and speak directly to that person, rather than the companion. When an interpreter is present, please look at the person who is deaf, not the interpreter, when communicating.

**Relax.** Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted common expressions such as "See you later" or "Got to be running along" that seem to relate to the person's disability.

**To get the attention of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing,** tap the person on the shoulder, wave your hand, or, in a large group, flicker the lights.

- Look directly at the person and speak clearly, naturally, and slowly to establish whether the person can read lips. Not all persons who are deaf can lip-read. Those who can will rely on facial expression and other body language to help in understanding.
- Show consideration by placing yourself under or near a light source and keeping your hands and food away from your mouth when speaking.
- Keep mustaches well-trimmed.
- Shouting won't help.
- Written notes to the person who is deaf or hard of hearing, however, may help facilitate the communication process.

**When talking with a person in a wheelchair** for more than a few minutes, sit in a chair, whenever possible, in order to place you at the person's eye level to facilitate conversation.

**When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision,** always identify yourself and others who may be with you. Example: *On my right is Candice Red Shawl.*

- When conversing in a group, give a vocal cue by announcing the name of the person to whom you are speaking.
- Speak in a normal tone of voice, indicate in advance when you will be moving from one place to another, and let it be known when the conversation is at an end.

**Listen attentively when you're talking to a person who has a speech disability.** Keep your manner encouraging rather than correcting.

- Exercise patience rather than attempting to speak for a person with a speech difficulty.
- When necessary, ask short questions that require short answers or a nod or a shake of the head.
- Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Repeat what you understand, or incorporate the interviewee's statements into each of the following questions. The person's reactions will clue you in and guide you.
- If you have difficulty communicating, be willing to repeat or rephrase a question. Open-ended questions are more appropriate than closed-ended questions.

Examples:

**Closed-Ended Question:** *You were a case manager in Social Services with the Three Affiliated Tribes for seven years. Is that correct?*

**Open-Ended Question:** *Tell me about your recent position as a case manager.*

**Do not shout at a person with a disability.** Shouting distorts speech for a deaf or hard-of-hearing person and is inappropriate for a blind or low vision person who can hear.

## Glossary of Acceptable Terms

**Person with a disability:** (*Unacceptable:* Handicapped or impaired)

**Disability, a general term used for functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability to walk, hear, or lift, for example. It may refer to a physical, mental, or sensory condition.**  
(*Unacceptable:* Impaired, handicap, handicapped person, or handicapped)

**People with cerebral palsy, people with spinal cord injuries:** (*Unacceptable:* Cerebral palsied, spinal cord injured. Never identify people solely by their disability.)

**Person who had a spinal cord injury, polio, a stroke, etc., or a person who has multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, arthritis, etc.** (*Unacceptable:* Victim. People with disabilities do not like to be perceived as victims for the rest of their lives, long after any victimization has occurred.)

**Has a disability, has a condition of (spina bifida, etc.), or born without legs, etc.** (*Unacceptable:* Defective, defect, deformed, vegetable. These words are offensive, dehumanizing, degrading, and stigmatizing.)

**Deaf:** Deafness often refers to a person who has a total loss of hearing. Hard of hearing refers to a person who has a partial loss of hearing within a range from slight to severe. Hard of hearing also describes a person who communicates through speaking and speech-reading, and who usually has listening and hearing abilities adequate for ordinary telephone communication. Many hard-of-hearing individuals use a hearing aid. Deaf people are sometimes able to speak and speech-read, despite profound hearing loss. Most people who identify themselves as deaf also use sign language. (*Unacceptable:* Hearing impaired; deaf and dumb is as bad as it sounds. The inability to speak does not indicate lack of intelligence.)

**Person who has a mental or developmental disability:** (*Unacceptable:* Retarded, moron, imbecile, and idiot. These are offensive to people who bear the label.)

**Use a wheelchair or crutches; a wheelchair user; walks with crutches.** (*Unacceptable:* Confined/restricted to a wheelchair; wheelchair bound. Most people who use a wheelchair or mobility devices do not regard them as confining. They are viewed as liberating, a means of getting around.)

**Non-disabled; able to walk, see, hear, etc.; people who are not disabled.** (*Unacceptable:* Healthy, when used to contrast with "disabled"--Healthy implies that the person with a disability is unhealthy. Many people with disabilities have excellent health. Normal--When used as the opposite of disabled, this implies that the person is abnormal. No one wants to be labeled as abnormal.)

**A person who has (name of disability): Example: a person who has multiple sclerosis.**  
(*Unacceptable:* Afflicted with, suffers from, a victim of--Most people with disabilities do not regard themselves as victim or afflicted or suffering continually. Afflicted--a disability is not an affliction.)

## Preparing for Sign Language Interpreters

When hiring an interpreter for a presenter who is deaf or for making presentations to an audience that may include participants who are deaf, remember that the interpreter is there to facilitate communication. An interpreter is always a neutral, uninvolved party. Interpreters are part of the team meant to deliver accurate and intended messages given by all parties.

The more advance notice that is provided to the interpreter, the more prepared he/she will be. This process will allow the interpreter to have the proper time needed for a meeting or event and prevent “cold” interpreting. Time for preparation is essential to allow accurate dissemination of the intended messages to the audience.

In addition to the name and type of event, always provide the name of the event contact person and a phone number. Give the following information to the interpreter to enhance the quality of the interpreted meeting/event:

- Clear address and directions to the event and the location where the interpreter is to check-in.
- Correct spellings of all names of those speaking or performing.
- A summary of subjects that will be presented by each speaker. Provide copies of any handouts for the interpreter prior to the meeting or event.
- A list of terms, acronyms, and words that are specific to the discussion, such as the usage of IHS (Indian Health Service) or BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs).
- Many times the names of tribes are difficult to interpret, so spellings or any abbreviated descriptions would be helpful.

If any information to be presented is in a language other than English, a written interpretation in English will be needed in advance. Any time you have lights on the presenter you will also need to have lights for the interpreter, especially if the event is inside an auditorium or in any dark area.

## Resources Regarding Interpreters

**Intertribal Deaf Council (IDC)** - Web site: [www.deafnative.com](http://www.deafnative.com) - IDC promotes the interests of deaf and hard-of-hearing members to advance issues related to social, educational, economic, and environmental well-being by fostering and enhancing their cultural, historical, and linguistic tribal traditions.

### **The National Association of the Deaf (NAD)**

814 Thayer Avenue

Silver Spring, MD 20910-4500

Phone: (301) 587-1788

TTY: (301) 587-1789

Fax: (301) 587-1791

Web site: [www.nad.org/openhouse/affiliates/SAs.html](http://www.nad.org/openhouse/affiliates/SAs.html)

The NAD is a private, nonprofit constituency organization with affiliates in each state and the District of Columbia. A complete listing of state associations can be found at the NAD Web site. Programs and

activities of the NAD include grassroots advocacy and empowerment; captioned media; certification of American Sign Language professionals; certification of sign language interpreters; deafness-related information and publications; legal assistance; policy development and research; public awareness; and youth leadership development.

### **Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc. (RID)**

333 Commerce Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Voice: (703) 838-0030  
TTY: (703) 838-0459  
Fax: (703) 838-0454

RID is a national nonprofit association for sign language interpreters with over 50 state and local affiliate offices. For additional guidance in working with an interpreter, instructions on how to hire an interpreter, or links to finding an interpreter, see the RID Web site.

### **Service Animals**

Over 12,000 people with disabilities in the United States use service animals; many of those people are in tribal communities. It is important to know about service animals and to find ways to ensure safe and comfortable access for people with disabilities in tribal communities to be accompanied by these vitally important aids. Service animals should be accommodated in tribal, federal, and other public buildings in tribal communities. Tribal housing developments should also consider ways to ensure adequate access for people with disabilities who use service animals. Although the most familiar types of service animals are guide dogs used by people who are blind, service animals assist persons who have other disabilities as well. Many disabling conditions are invisible. A service animal is *not* required to have any special certification.

#### ***What Is a Service Animal?***

A service animal is *not* a pet!

According to ADA, a service animal is any animal that has been individually trained to provide assistance or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a physical or mental disability that substantially limits one or more major life functions.

Service animals/service dogs can be trained to reliably perform many tasks, including the following:

- **Leading** a person who has a visual impairment around obstacles, to destinations (seating, across street, to/through door, to/into elevator, etc.).
- **Sound discrimination** to alert a person who is deaf or hard of hearing to the presence of specific sounds, such as
  - Smoke/fire/clock alarms
  - Telephone
  - Baby crying
  - Sirens

- Another person
- Timers buzzing
- Knocks at door
- Unusual sounds (e.g., things that go bump in the night, mice in the cabinet)
- **General assistance**, including
  - Mobility (helping person balance for transfer/ambulation, pulling wheelchair, helping person rise from sitting or fallen position)
  - Retrieval (getting items that are dropped or otherwise out of reach, carrying items by mouth)
  - Scent discrimination (locate items; people; places, such as bathrooms, elevators, escalators, return path)
  - Miscellaneous (e.g., open/close doors and drawers, help person undress/dress, carry items in backpack, act as physical buffer to jostling by others, put clothes in washer/remove from dryer, bark to alert for help)
- **Sense and alert** owners to oncoming seizures. It is currently unknown why or how some dogs are able to do this, but a number of dogs have demonstrated the ability to warn their owners of oncoming seizures, enabling the owners to position themselves safely.
- **Emotional support**, providing a known, trusting entity to facilitate homeostasis (e.g., maintenance of blood pressure, respiration, heart rate, temperature) during potentially difficult episodes. (Delta Society, 2002)

### ***Service Animal Access***

The civil rights of persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their service animals in all places of public and housing accommodations is protected by the following federal laws:

- Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)
- Air Carrier Access Act (1986)
- Fair Housing Amendments Act (1988)
- Rehabilitation Act (1973)

### ***Service Animal Etiquette***

- Do not touch the service animal, or the person it assists, without permission.
- Do not make noises at the service animal; they may distract the animal from doing its job.
- Do not feed the service animal; doing so may disrupt its schedule.
- Do not be offended if the person does not feel like discussing his/her disability or the assistance the service animal provides. Not everyone wants to be a walking show-and-tell exhibit.

### ***Service Animal Resources***

#### **The Delta Society**

580 Naches Avenue SW, Suite 101  
 Renton, WA 98055-2297  
 Phone: (425) 226-7357

Fax: (425) 235-1076  
E-mail: info@deltasociety.org

The Delta Society is the leading international resource for the human-animal bond. The Delta Society has been the force to validate the important role of animals for people's health and well-being by promoting the results of research to the media and health and human services organizations.

### **Canine Companions for Independence**

#### **National Headquarters & Northwest Regional Center**

2965 Dutton Avenue  
PO Box 446  
Santa Rosa, CA 95402-0446  
Phone: (707) 577-1700  
TDD: (707) 577-1756  
E-mail: info@caninecompanions.org

#### **Dogs for the Deaf**

10175 Wheeler Road  
Central Point, OR 97502  
Voice/TDD: (541) 826-9220  
Fax: (541) 826-6696  
E-mail: info@dogstothedeaf.org

Dogs for the Deaf's mission is to rescue and professionally train dogs to assist people and enhance their lives. Hearing dogs are chosen from adoption shelters, where they might otherwise be euthanized if no homes are found for them. By using shelter dogs, Dogs for the Deaf is able to help alleviate some of the unwanted dog population by rescuing these dogs, training them, and placing them in loving homes where they can provide an important service. The dogs are usually mixed breeds, small to medium in size, and up to 24 months of age. The trainers look for dogs that are friendly, energetic, healthy, and intelligent. Each dog is individually evaluated by a Dog for the Deaf trainer. Those passing the aptitude tests are brought back to the facility for a thorough medical evaluation and needed vaccinations. All dogs are spayed or neutered and then begin the intensive 4 to 6 months of training.

### **References**

City of San Antonio Disability Access Office/Planning Department. (2000). Disability Etiquette Handbook.

Delta Society. (2002). The human-animal health connection. Retrieved October 24, 2002, from [www.deltasociety.org/dsb300.htm#tasks](http://www.deltasociety.org/dsb300.htm#tasks)