Disability Etiquette

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. – Psalm 139:13-16

People-First Language
- Use people-first language that puts the emphasis on the individual, not on the disability. It is a subtle difference but speaks values! For example, say the woman who is blind vs. the blind woman.

Greeting the Whole Family
- When you greet a family, acknowledge every family member.
- Make a genuine, extra effort to include the individual with a disability

When Interacting with an Individual in a Wheelchair
- Give wheelchair users enough room; their wheelchair is part of their personal space.
- Don’t lean on or over a wheelchair.
- Treat the wheelchair as an extension of the individual’s body.
- Converse with wheelchair users at eye level by sitting in another chair or kneeling beside them.
- Do not assume that the individual needs you to push his or her wheelchair. Always ask first and encourage independence.
- Before helping anyone in or out of a wheelchair, set the brake and turn off the power controllers.

Working with Individuals Who are Hard of Hearing
- Face the individual and speak slowly at normal pitch.
- Be sure the light accentuates your face and does not glare in the individual’s eyes.
- Attract the individual’s attention before you try to communicate.
- Use meaningful hand and body gestures.

Engaging with Individuals Who have a Visual Impairment
- Clear communication is the key.
- Announce your arrival and departure, letting them know who you are until they recognize your voice.
- When walking together, guide—don’t pull. Allow them to hold on to your elbow or arm rather than holding theirs.
- Details matter, so take time to describe your surroundings
- Consider their guide dog if they have one. This dog is working, so do not touch it or distract it unless you have permission from your friend.

For more information, visit irresistiblechurch.org
Working with an Individual on the Autistic Spectrum

- Keep in mind that the autism spectrum covers a broad range of characteristics.
- Many individuals with autism may be apprehensive about social interaction.
- Most individuals are responsive to sensory input such as loud noises, scratchy textures, bright or flashing lights.
- Find a person’s individual comfort level and make an effort to stay there.
- Be positive and upbeat, even if the individual doesn’t give you eye contact or a smile. Suggest new activity or location options without forcing decisions.
- Individuals with autism like routine and predictability. Tell them how long the current activity is and what will happen next.

Relax and Treat the Individual Like Anyone Else

- When possible, talk directly with adults and children rather than through spouses, parents and caregivers.
- Talk “with” and not “at” the individual.
- When speaking to children who are nonverbal be positive and direct. Use age-appropriate language and tone.
- Learn as much as you can about the way your new friend communicates.
- Kids with disabilities love to play just like other kids.
- Adults with disabilities enjoy friendships and fun just like other adults.
- Laugh, smile and enjoy the individual with a disability.
- Respect the work of guide or companion dogs by not distracting them or trying to play with them. These dogs are working!
- When directing children, tell them what “to do” rather than what “not to do”.