

EVERY CUSTOMER MATTERS

Best practices and people with disabilities

When customers with disabilities request accommodations, it is important to reasonably support those requests.

The Americans with Disabilities Act means that including people with disabilities is not only a good business practice, but it is the law!



Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): Defined disabilities

1. ADA DEFINED DISABILITY

The ADA defines disability as a medical condition or disorder (called an impairment) that substantially limits a person in doing basic activities (called major life activities).

2. ADA IMPAIRMENTS

An impairment must substantially limit a major life activity. Examples of major life activities include but are not limited to walking, seeing, hearing, caring for oneself, and thinking.

3. HIDDEN DISABILITIES

You may be required to provide accommodations to a person you cannot tell has a disability.

4. ACCOMMODATE UPON REQUEST

While the ADA does not specifically name all impairments that are covered, it is almost always against the law to question a person about his/her disability.



Interacting with ADA in the workplace

1. PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Millions of Americans have a disability. You will encounter customers/guests with disabilities. Some of these guests will ask for ADA accommodations.

2. EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The ADA prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including at work, in schools, on transportation, and in all public and private places that are open to the general public.

3. EQUAL ACCESS

The ADA requires public accommodations and commercial facilities to offer equal access and treatment, effective communication, and removal of existing barriers for people with disabilities.

4. FINES AND PENALTIES

Not supporting people with disabilities' rights and opportunities may result in fines and/or lawsuits.



Interacting with someone who uses a service animal

1. SERVICE ANIMALS ARE NOT PETS

Service animals are trained to perform tasks for people with disabilities, such as guiding people who are blind, picking up a dropped item, or alerting a Deaf person.

2. SERVICE ANIMALS ARE AN ACCOMMODATION

Businesses that serve the public must allow people with disabilities to bring their service animals into all areas where customers are normally allowed to go.

3. IS THIS A SERVICE ANIMAL?

Businesses may ask if this is a service animal or what tasks the animal has been trained to do, but cannot require special ID cards for the animal or ask about the person's disability.

4. UNCONTROLLED SERVICE ANIMAL

You may ask the owner to remove a service animal if the animal is not under control. Do not touch the service animal without permission.



Interacting with someone who uses a wheelchair

1. ASK BEFORE YOU ACT People who use wheelchairs have different disabilities and varying abilities. If you believe someone with a disability needs assistance, ask before you act.

2. ASK BEFORE YOU TOUCH People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space and an extension of their bodies; ask before touching.

3. LANGUAGE MATTERS Say "person who uses a wheelchair" rather than "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair bound." The wheelchair is what allows the person to get around and participate in society.

4. SPEAK DIRECTLY Always speak directly to the person in a wheelchair, not to his/her companion or aide. If you have trouble understanding, then ask the person in the wheelchair to repeat or ask for ways to improve communication.



Interacting with someone who is blind

1. IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND SPEAK DIRECTLY

Treat a person who is blind as you would anyone else. Address him/her directly. Share your name and your role, such as security guard, usher, etc.

2. OFFER SUPPORT AND WAIT FOR DIRECTION

Many people who are blind do not need support. Ask what support is needed.

3. DESCRIBE SETTINGS AND OBSTACLES

If mobility support is needed, offer your arm and let the individual hold it. Walk naturally. Describe the setting, noting obstacles, such as stairs ('up' or 'down'). If you give a warning, be specific.

4. ASK BEFORE TOUCHING GUIDE DOG OR CANE

A cane is part of the personal space of the individual who is blind. Don't touch or move it. If it's in the way or needs to be stored, let the person know -- including where you've put it, even if it is for a brief period of time. If the person has a guide dog, respect that the dog is working.



Interacting with someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing

1. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Businesses must provide effective means of communicating with clients/guests who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. Writing notes or pointing is okay for brief exchanges. Complex and interactive communications may require a qualified sign language interpreter or other accommodations.

2. SPEAK DIRECTLY

Make sure to get the person's attention, such as by a tap on the shoulder or slowly flickering the lights. Maintain eye contact, even if the person uses a sign language interpreter. Talk directly to the person ('What would you like?') rather than to the interpreter ('Ask her what she'd like.').

3. SPEAK CLEARLY IN A NORMAL TONE

Many people who have hearing loss watch people's lips as they speak to assist them in understanding. Avoid chewing gum, smoking, or obscuring your mouth while speaking.