



Disability Etiquette

Respecting People with Disabilities

**PEOPLE WHO
ARE MOBILITY
IMPAIRED**

Disability etiquette is not limited to one aspect of life. Its guidelines on how to relate with people with disabilities across all aspects of life. It helps the world understand the best way to engage people with disabilities: as people, we come in contact with every day, as friends, as colleagues, and our fellow church members.

This week we will focus on persons with mobility Issues.

People who are mobility impaired include people with varying types of physical impairments. People with mobility impairments often use assistive devices or mobility aids such as wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, canes and artificial limbs to aid in mobility.

- Wheelchair users are people, not equipment.
- Never patronise wheelchair users by patting them on the head or shoulder.
- When speaking to a person using a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.
- Don't push or touch a person's wheelchair; it's part of their personal space. If you help someone down a curb without waiting for instructions, you may dump them out of their chair. You may detach the chair's parts if you lift it by the handles or the footrest.
- Keep the ramps and wheelchair-accessible doors to the Church building unlocked and unblocked. Obstacles such as tables, chairs or boxes should not be in the middle of aisles or on ramps.
- Be aware of wheelchair users' reach limits. Place as many items (e.g., tithe envelopes, programmes) as possible within their grasp. When talking to a

wheelchair user, grab your own chair and sit at their level. If that's not possible, stand at a slight distance, so they aren't straining their neck to make eye contact with you.

- If your Church building has different routes through it, be sure your signs direct wheelchair users to the most accessible ways around the facility. People who walk with a cane or crutches also need to know the easiest way to get around a place, but stairs may be easier for them than a ramp. Ensure ushers can answer questions about the most accessible way around the building and grounds.
- If the general toilets are not accessible or are located on an inaccessible floor, allow the person in a wheelchair to use a private accessible toilet.
- People who use canes or crutches need their arms to balance themselves, so never grab them. People who are mobility-impaired may lean on a door for support as they open it. Pushing the door open from behind or unexpectedly opening the door may cause them to fall. Even pulling out or pushing in a chair may present a problem. Always ask before offering help.
- If you offer a seat to a person who is mobility-impaired, keep in mind that chairs with arms or with higher seats are easier for some people to use.
- Falls may be a problem for people with mobility impairments. Be sure to set out adequate warning signs if the floor is wet. Also, put out mats on rainy days to keep the floors as dry as possible.
- Some people have limited use of their hands, wrists or arms. Be prepared to offer assistance with reaching for, grasping or lifting objects, opening doors etc.

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Source: Karen Reyes MD/MPH UC Berkeley School of Public Health