

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: Disability Etiquette in the Workplace

Canadians enjoy a high quality of life that is recognized internationally. However, persons with disabilities continue to encounter barriers in society and in the workplace. To address these barriers, the Canadian Government is undertaking some important initiatives to promote inclusion and accessibility for Canadians with disabilities in our communities and workplaces.

EARN is committed to achieving equality in the workplace. Creating an inclusive organization in which every person can contribute is a key component of this commitment and makes good sense for our employees, our business and the communities that we serve. Our continued success depends on our ability to attract talented individuals and to value, build, access, and utilize the strengths of all our employees, including those with disabilities.

For managers wanting to successfully integrate people with disabilities into their workforce, the following etiquette strategies may be useful.

### 1) Recruitment Etiquette

People with disabilities represent an untapped labour pool offering valuable skills, qualifications, and assets for employers. Several recruitment strategies can increase an organization's access to potential applicants.

- Post job openings with local disability organizations and college and university career centres. Advertise vacancies within disability-related publications, websites, and job fairs.
- Make sure that your advertisement provides more than one way for applicants to respond and avoid placing restrictions like “no phone calls”.
- Include details about the job location in all postings and highlight accessible features of the location, if appropriate.
- Indicate the availability of flexible working conditions such as flexible scheduling, if appropriate.
- Only include qualifications in job postings that are actually required for the available position.
- Advertise the organization as an equal opportunity employer.

- Establish internship, co-op and mentoring programs targeted towards persons with disabilities.
- Make the advertisements visibly appealing by using plain language, emphasizing key words and using testimonials to support diversity and inclusion in the organisation.
- Remind applicants that if they are not qualified for the current opportunity, additional opportunities may be available in the future.

## **Interview Etiquette**

The Public Service Commission has developed a comprehensive document titled “[A guide for assessing persons with disabilities: How to determine and implement assessment accommodations](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/public-service-hiring-guides/guide-assessing-persons-disabilities.html)” which can be found at Canada.ca: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-service-commission/services/public-service-hiring-guides/guide-assessing-persons-disabilities.html>

This document provides practical advice about the changes or modifications to assessment tools and procedures that can be made, to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities within an appointment process.

- Let applicants know that accommodations can be provided upon request.
- Schedule interviews at an accessible location. If the location is inaccessible be prepared to conduct the interview at an alternate location.
- Be familiar with travel directions to the interview location, including the path of travel into the building.
- Be aware that an applicant with a disability may need to arrange for transportation following the interview. Provide the applicant with an estimate of the interview duration and expected end time, if requested.

## **Greeting the applicant**

- Use a normal tone of voice when welcoming the applicant. Only raise your voice upon request.
- Call the person by their first name only when extending similar familiarity to other applicants. Never patronize people in wheelchairs by patting them on the hand or shoulder.
- Offer the applicant to use the bathroom or drinking fountain before getting started.

- Always introduce yourself and other interview participants. Offer to shake hands, if appropriate. People with limited hand use or an artificial limb can usually shake hands.
- Speak directly to the applicant instead of a companion, personal attendant, or interpreter when greeting the applicant.

## **Interviewing**

- Treat all applicants with respect.
- Always ask similar questions of all applicants regardless of their disability. Conduct the interview emphasizing skill and competencies that align with the needs of the job.
- Select an interview location with adequate lighting.
- Speak directly to the applicant instead of a companion, personal attendant, or interpreter when greeting the applicant.

## **New employee etiquette**

- Review the physical features of the work environment and remove any potential barriers.
- Identify assistive technologies available to increase workplace accessibility.
- Provide alternate formats (e.g., large print, braille) of all necessary work-related documents including benefits information, employee manuals and policies, and professional development materials, as needed.
- Prepare co-workers and supervisors for the arrival of a new employee with a disability. This can include training and orientation to disability-specific issues.
- Remember to include employees with disabilities in emergency evacuation planning and procedures.

## **2) Mobility, Sensory, Cognitive and Psychiatric Impairments**

The following etiquette tips address a wide range of workplace and recruitment situations. It is not a comprehensive list of disability etiquette in the workplace. It is always wise to ask the individual what they would prefer.

## Individuals with mobility impairments

- Do not make assumptions about limitations based on appearance or the use of assistive devices such as canes, walkers or wheelchairs. These assistive devices may be used regularly or only as required based on the individual's limitations.
- Do not make assumptions about an individual's needs for accommodations. Some people have non-visible disabilities that could require some form of accommodation such as accessible parking (person with asthma or a heart condition).
- Do not touch or lean on a wheelchair, move a person's walker or cane without being asked, or pet or distract a service animal without first asking the owner if it is okay. A wheelchair, mobility aid or service animal is an extension of their bodies.
- Be aware of the worksite and its accessible and inaccessible elements. Offer to provide a tour to the employee and if they comment on accessibility or potential barriers.
- Make workplace accessibility changes according to the specific work-related needs of the employee (e.g., keeping paths clear, ergonomic assessments, position items at appropriate reach heights).
- When planning work-related social events or training opportunities, keep disability etiquette in mind. Host events at accessible locations and design activities that include all employees.
- Ask whether a person needs assistance before you help. Then listen or ask for instructions.
- Sit down when speaking for more than a few minutes to an individual who uses a wheelchair so you are at eye level.
- Be careful of the language you use. For example, people who use wheelchairs or scooters are not confined or bound to them. For more information see Way with words: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/words-images.html#h3.1>

## Individuals with Sight Loss

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) has published a “[Clear Print Accessibility Guidelines](https://cnib.ca/en/sight-loss-info/blindness-at-work/creating-inclusive-workplace?region=on)” to assist when producing materials and products: <https://cnib.ca/en/sight-loss-info/blindness-at-work/creating-inclusive-workplace?region=on>

- Be familiar with the route of travel to the interview location. Provide descriptive directions that do not require the person to rely on visual references. (e.g., you will be

coming to a stairwell in approximately 3 paces. Handrail is on the right hand side. You will come to a landing and the stairwell turns to the right)

- Verbally greet and identify yourself before extending your hand to greet a person who is blind. Use the same courtesy when entering or leaving a room, or saying goodbye when ending a conversation. Do not just walk away when talking to a person who is blind or partially sighted.
- Ensure that the person who is blind is left in contact with a tangible object in the environment such as a wall, a table, a chair. This will eliminate the uncomfortable feeling of standing alone in an open space and not having a reference point.
- When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
- Inquire if your assistance is desired. If so touch your hand to the back of their hand as a signal for them to take your arm.
- Offer your arm instead of taking the arm of a person who is blind or partially sighted when guiding the person. As you walk, tell the person where you are going, take note of stairs or slopes, and point-out opening doors or other obstacles.
- Tell the person who is blind when they are approaching a door and in which direction the door opens. For example, the door opens to the left (hinge side) and away from us.
- Alert the person who is blind verbally when they are to walk up or down stairs. Stairs are approached squarely, never at an angle. Ensure that they are on the side with the handrail. The guide is always one step ahead. Stop at the end of the stairs and verbalize “last step”.
- When approaching a chair from the front bring the person who is blind in contact with the front of the chair so that the knees lightly touch the seat. Inform them, what type of seat it is (arm chair, bench, rocker, etc.). You can also place your hand on the back of the chair or on the seat and the person who is blind can slide their hand down your arm to make contact with it.
- Offer new employees a guided tour of the workplace.
- Do not pet or distract a guide dog. When walking along-side someone who is using a guide dog, walk in front, behind or beside the handler.
- Offer to read written information, when appropriate, during an interview or on the job.
- Inform an employee who is blind or partially sighted of structural changes or hazards he may need to be aware of in the event of new construction or workplace modifications.

- Provide work-related materials, such as employee handbooks or benefits information in an accessible format (e.g., large print, braille, or accessible web page accessed with a screen reader).

## **Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

Be aware that individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing communicate in various ways. Pay attention to cues such as whether the person uses sign language, is reading lips, writing or gesturing.

- Do not be afraid to say that you do not understand if you have trouble understanding the person's speech. It is better to find another way to communicate, such as through writing notes, than to pretend to understand.
- Do not put your hands in front of your face, or food or other items in your mouth when communicating with someone who is reading lips.
- Do not turn your head or walk away while talking.
- When possible, speak in a well-lit room that is free from background noises.
- Maintain eye contact and direct your communication to the person who is deaf when using a sign-language interpreter.
- Speak using a normal tone of voice unless asked to raise your voice, and rephrase rather than repeat the same words if you are not understood.
- During a meeting, ensure the person who is deaf or hard of hearing can address the individual who is talking and make eye contact.
- Get the attention of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing before you start speaking by waiving your hand, tapping them on the shoulder, or through some other appropriate gesture.
- Talk with the individual about their preferred method of communication for job training or complex work-related situations. When appropriate, provide a qualified sign-language interpreter, CART service, or training videos that are captioned.
- Remember to include employees who are deaf or hard of hearing in casual conversations and social events. Provide a sign-language interpreter for employer-sponsored social events, when appropriate.

## Individuals with Speech impairments

- Be patient and listen. Do not complete words or sentences for the individual. Do not be afraid to say that you do not understand. Ask them to repeat and then listen carefully. Repeat what you heard to verify. Ask them to write it down.
- Ask them short questions that require short answers, or a nod of the head.
- Be attentive to your mannerisms by maintaining conversational eye contact and focusing on the content of communication rather than the delivery of the communication.
- Relax and communicate as you would normally.
- Provide interview questions in advance, if possible, to allow the individual time to prepare and deliver responses effectively or allow them to respond in writing.
- Consider offering a personal interview as an alternative to a telephone interview for people who stutter.

## Individuals with Respiratory Impairments or Chemical Sensitivities

Products that are commonly used in the workplace such as cleaning products and markers can trigger a reaction for someone who has a respiratory or chemical sensitivity.

- Use less toxic products when possible.
- Encourage employees to use fragrance-free products and discontinue wearing fragrances and colognes in the workplace.
- Commit to maintaining good ventilation and indoor air quality.
- Do not make assumptions based upon appearance. A person with asthma may not appear to be limited, but may need accessible parking because walking long distances or extreme weather can affect their breathing.

## Individuals with Psychiatric Impairments

- Avoid stereotypes and assumptions about the individual and how they may interact with others. In most cases, it will not be obvious that someone has a psychiatric impairment.

- Recognize and respect the differences in people. People with psychiatric impairments may behave differently than other individuals, may have trouble interpreting social cues, or may have different ways of coping with their impairment.
- Respect personal space and do not touch the individual or their personal belongings.
- Provide support and assistance, as appropriate.
- Be patient. Allow the individual time to think and answer questions independently.

### **Individuals with Cognitive Impairments**

- Do not assume that because someone has a cognitive impairment, such as a learning disability, that they have below-average intelligence. They may just have difficulty receiving, expressing or processing information.
- Ask the person if they prefer verbal, written or hands-on instruction or a combination of methods in training and work-related situations. For example provide verbal instructions and follow-up with an email that clarifies the request.
- Speak directly to the individual, rather than their companion, and use words or phrases according to their level of complexity.
- Be patient. Allow the individual time to think and respond independently.