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Welcoming Disabled Customers Guidelines

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INTRODUCTION

These guidelines have been produced to assist staff to respond to the needs of disabled customer's individual requirements and to learn about what you need to consider when dealing with disabled customers.

The terms disability and/or impairment cover more than just wheelchair users or people with guide/assistance dogs. These guidelines should give you an understanding of how to offer practical help to people across a range of disabilities and how to respond to their individual needs as customers.

THE BASICS

- ***Never assume that a disabled person needs help***

Most disabled people are independent, just because they have visited your premises, it doesn't mean that they suddenly become child-like, dangerous or helpless. As with all other customers or visitors there is no reason to assume that they will need any special assistance.

- ***Always ask before providing help***

This means using questions like 'would you like any help?' instead of saying 'here let me help you'.

- ***Speak directly to the disabled person***

Even if the person they are with is acting as a go-between and is acting or answering on their behalf.

- ***Avoid terms such as 'we have special facilities for...'***

Instead you should say 'the accessible toilets are located in the hallway' or 'there are wider parking bays near the front of the car park'.

- ***Do not rush somebody with a speech impairment***

Don't finish their sentences for them and don't pretend to understand them if you do not.

- ***Do not ask personal questions***

For example 'what happened to you?' and 'what's wrong with you?'. These are intrusive and rude.

- ***Speak clearly and a little more slowly to deaf and hard of hearing customers***

If at first you are not understood try to rephrase what you have said. You can also write the information down.

- ***Do not stare at people who have a facial disfigurement***

Again this is intrusive and rude.

- ***Do not assume somebody has only one impairment***

Some disabled people have more than one. For example, people with Cerebral Palsy may have mobility and speech difficulties.

- ***Never assume that disabled people want to be 'non-disabled'***

We do not assume that white people want to be black or men want to be women, we recognise that most of the problems that arise from ethnicity or gender are based upon prejudice and ignorance. The same is true about disability.

GUIDE/ASSISTANCE DOGS

The Guide/Assistance Dog is a very complex mobility aid, more so than any other and requires particular consideration.

- A Guide/Assistance dog in a white harness is a working dog and must never be distracted, by noise, with direct eye contact or hand signals. Ignore the dog. An accident is likely to occur resulting from a momentary lapse of the dogs' concentration. There are no exceptions even for the owners' family.
- Always ask the user of a guide/assistance dog which is out of harness (identified by a fluorescent yellow Guide/Assistance Dog sleeve on it's lead) before directly talking to or touching the dog. While mainly placid the dog has a very close relationship with (and responsibility for) its owner and could react defensively if surprised by an approach without invitation.
- Never feed or offer titbits to a Guide/Assistance Dog. They eat a carefully regulated, balanced, healthy diet to maintain maximum fitness. Rewards from the handler are an integral part of motivating and training working dogs.
- Guide/Assistance Dogs like humans occasionally make mistakes and have to be corrected with a jerk of the handle, the lead or severe voice command. It is difficult enough to have to cope with the result of the dog's mistake, correct it without adding to existing stress because it knows it was responsible for the error without also having to deal with comments from unqualified observers.

The Guide/Assistance dog owner undertakes extensive handling skills training in addition to mobility training; so do not pass comment in this situation.

- Guide/Assistance dogs normally travel in the passenger foot well of cars and taxis but should not be there if the vehicle has airbags which may cause injury when inflated, even in minor impacts.

A good general rule is to ignore the Guide/Assistance dog and consider how you would feel if a stranger walked up to your partner, patted them on the head or rear and said:

“She/he's nice, I got one just like it at home”

THE LANGUAGE WE USE

Terminology is important because words reflect our attitudes and beliefs. However, some of the terms we tend to use may not reflect how some disabled people see themselves. Using the right words matters. This is not about ‘political correctness’ but using wording and language which disabled people find acceptable.

Negative Terminology includes:

Afflicted with	this conveys a tragic or negative view about disability
Suffering from	‘suffering from’ confuses disability with illness and also implies that impairment may be seen as a personal burden. Negative expressions feed into negative attitudes and perpetuate negative stereotypes.
The Blind or the Deaf	Lumping everyone together in this way is felt by many to take away their individuality. Nowadays most prefer the phrase ‘blind people’ or ‘deaf people’.
Victim of	This again plays to a sense that having or acquiring impairment is automatically a tragedy
Cripple or Crippled by	Use ‘the person has X’ or ‘a person with X’.
Deaf and Dumb	The phrase ‘deaf and dumb’ is demeaning and inaccurate. Many deaf people use sign language to communicate and ‘dumb’ implies they are stupid. Use ‘deaf person’ or ‘sign language user’ or ‘someone who cannot hear or speak’.

The Disabled	There is no such tribe as 'the disabled' use the term 'disabled people'.
Handicapped	The term 'handicapped' is inappropriate with its images of begging and disabled people being 'cap in hand', use the phrase disabled people.
Invalid	This term literally means 'not valid' use the phrase, disabled people.
Able-bodied	The preferred term is 'non-disabled' 'able bodies' suggests that all impairments are physical.
Finally	Some phrases are perfectly acceptable. People who use wheelchairs do 'go for a walk'. It is perfectly acceptable to say to a blind person 'I will see you later'. Deaf people are unlikely to take offence at 'did you hear about...'. etc. Common everyday phrases of this kind are unlikely to cause offence.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU DO?

You should familiarise yourself with the 'Clear Print Guidelines' that provide advice on how you should communicate in written form. Copies are available from Human Resources or on their intranet site.

CONCLUSION

The advice contained in these guidelines is in the main a matter of 'common sense'. Please remember to treat ALL customers with courtesy and respect.

Disabled customers do not expect 'special' treatment just the same courtesy and respect as any other customer. Further Advice is available from Human Resources, The Pavilions, Clydach Vale, CF40 2XX, Tel: 01443 424075

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