

30 Things You Can Do to Be Hospitable to People with Disabilities

1. When talking with someone with a disability, look at the person not at the interpreter or companion.
2. When hosting someone for a meal, ask if there are any food allergies or diet restrictions.
3. Use person-first language such as “a person with schizophrenia” or “Mary uses a wheelchair.”
4. Avoid using such words/phrases as “retarded,” “wheelchair-bound,” “suffers from,” “handicapped,” “able-bodied,” “victim,” “defect.”
5. Don’t lean on someone’s wheelchair.
6. When talking to someone in a wheelchair, position yourself at the person’s eye level.
7. Don’t interact with a guide dog.
8. When interacting with someone who has a visual disability, say who you are when you approach and announce when you leave.
9. Be flexible when people in the congregation make additional noise (clapping off beat, shouting, or the sound of a medical device).
10. Label foods at potlucks, especially when they contain nuts or gluten.
11. Seek permission and instructions before assisting someone
12. If anyone in your congregation has a disability or a child with a disability that requires costly accommodations, consider how your church might offer to assist in paying for such costs.
13. Offer respite care to a spouse or parent of someone with a disability or long-term illness.
14. When talking to someone with an intellectual disability, speak in your normal tone.
15. When listening to someone who has difficulty speaking, be patient and ask him to repeat what you did not understand instead of pretending that you understood.
16. Avoid calling people with disabilities “kids” or words like “honey”; address them as you would anyone else.
17. Invite an adult or child with disabilities to your home or on an outing and find out in advance about the person’s preferences and needs.
18. As a way to provide relief to parents, offer to sit with a child with a disability during worship one time each month.
19. Explore websites dealing with disability issues, such as www.crcna.org/disability, www.rca.org/disabilities, and www.clcnetwork.org/church_services.
20. Buy and read a book such as *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* by Thomas Reynolds or *Helping Kids Include Kids with Disabilities* by Barbara J. Newman. Then donate it to your church library.
21. Sit near people with disabilities during worship.
22. Offer transportation (to church, medical appointments, etc.) to someone with a disability.
23. Just say hi.
24. Consider starting a Friendship ministry at your church (www.friendship.org).
25. Educate your children about ways to interact with people in their lives who have a disability.
26. When assisting a person with visual impairments, allow her to hold onto you rather than you holding onto her.
27. Do not gossip about someone who is socially awkward or different.
28. Encourage your kids to befriend kids with disabilities.
29. Send a note of encouragement to someone with a disability or their caregiver.
30. Offer to pick up supplies or prescriptions for someone with a disability or her family.

The Christian Reformed and Reformed Church in America collaborated to produce this resource which highlights what ordinary people are already doing in their Christian Reformed or Reformed Church in America congregations. Additional copies can be printed to hang in your church at www.crcna.org/disability

Resources

Easter Seals website. "Disability Etiquette". www.easterseals.com/site/PageServer?pagename=ntl_etiquette

Everybody Belongs. Everybody Serves: A Handbook for Disability Advocates. (2009) *Disability Concerns, Christian Reformed Church in North America*: Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Karen Breuker. Phone Interview. January 13, 2010

Laura Koning. Phone Interview. January 14, 2010

The Memphis Center for Independent Living website. "Disability Etiquette".
www.mcil.org/mcil/mcil/etiqu01.htm

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