

The needs and capabilities of people with disabilities vary from person to person, even among individuals that have the same disability. This informational sheet provides basic tips for consumers and retail employees that will assist them in interacting with consumers who have disabilities.

General tips for interacting with a person with a disability:

Use the proper language when speaking to and about persons with disabilities. Instead of calling someone a “blind/deaf person,” use “a person who is blind/deaf.” An individual is not defined by her disability; rather it is simply one characteristic of the individual.

Offer assistance to persons with disabilities. If a person is in a wheelchair, you might offer to obtain an item that otherwise is beyond his reach. However, if the person declines, do not insist on helping.

Do not touch a person unless specifically instructed to do so. Do not lean on a person’s wheelchair, grab a walking stick, or otherwise interfere with an individual’s mobility or communication device.

Always look at and speak directly to a person with a disability. Though the person may have a guide or companion, make eye contact with and talk to the individual rather than the person accompanying them.

Do not pet service dogs without first asking the owner. Service animals have a job to do and their owners rely on them for mobility and other purposes. It is important for service animals to stay focused on their jobs.

If you see a person using a guide dog or cane, announce your presence immediately so the person knows where you are. For example, a simple “on your left” tells the person where you are located. There is no obvious way to immediately determine whether or not someone is visually impaired, or to what extent, when first meeting him. Treat him with respect and courtesy.

Be patient when trying to communicate. Some individuals may need you to repeat yourself more than once or may need to use alternative methods (like writing with a pen and paper) to communicate fully. Take the time to understand what is being said to you and to be understood by the person.

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The high level of customer service that you provide to consumers is extremely valuable. Your ability to effectively interact with people with disabilities will ensure a pleasant shopping experience for all your customers.

Additional tips for store employees:

Make reasonable accommodations to help a person with a disability. Clear aisles for wheelchair or service dog access.

Take a shopper with a hearing disability to a quiet place to ask a question.

Describe a product to a shopper who is blind or has low-vision.

Service animals are allowed in stores. A person is not required to carry proof of a disability and service animals are not required to be certified.

Contact Information

MA Commission for the Blind

Phone: (617) 727-5550

Website: www.mass.gov/mcb

MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Voice: (617) 740-1600

TTY: (617) 470-1700

Website: www.mass.gov/mcdhh

MA Office on Disability

Phone: (617) 727-7440

Website: www.mass.gov/mod



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