

# HEADS UP

## UPDATES AND ISSUES

### DIVERSITY AND CIVIL RIGHTS



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### Disability Etiquette

According to the 2011 American Community Survey, nearly 9% percent of Utah's civilian population has a disability such as hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, or independent living difficulties. Extension professionals should use proper etiquette when interacting with clients, peers, and partners. Here are tips by Howard Ross, founder and chief learning officer of Cook Ross, Inc. on how to act when someone...

#### *Is visually impaired:*

- Immediately greet a blind person who has entered the room. This lets the individual know you are present and ready to assist.
- Introduce yourself by sharing your name and role or position and introduce others who are present.
- Address people who are blind or have low vision by their name.
- Let the person know when you are leaving the room.
- Supplement visual cues such as head nodding with verbal clues.

#### *Is hearing impaired:*

- To get attention, first call the person's name. If there is no response, wave your hand or gently touch the person on the arm or shoulder.
- Look directly at and speak directly to the deaf or hard of hearing person, not the interpreter or others who may accompany the individual.
- Clarify which mode of communication and language the person prefers. Not all individuals know American Sign Language or spoken English.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Facial expressions and natural gestures enhance communication.

#### *Has a physical disability:*

- Be mindful that perceptions of a person's impairment may not be accurate. Rather than making assumptions, ask the individual about conditions that may be pertinent.
- Look at and speak directly to the person, not others who may have accompanied the person.
- Sit down when speaking for more than a few minutes with a person who uses a wheelchair so you are at eye level. If this isn't feasible, stand at a slight distance.
- Be mindful of the individual's reach limits. Placing items within reach promotes access.
- Some people rely on their arms to help them balance. Before attempting to touch or grab an arm, ask for permission to do so.
- Before providing assistance, ask the person whether and what kind of assistance is welcome.

Source: *Diversity Executive*, November/December 2012

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