Wheelchair Etiquette

1. Respect personal space. Don’t hang on, lean on, or touch a person’s chair without permission. If you are close family or friends, establish the personal space boundaries in your individual relationship.

2. Hold doors or offer to help, but don’t force help or ever grab a chair without permission.

3. Assume competence. Physical impairment does not necessarily correlate directly with intellectual impairment. Speak directly to the individual using a wheelchair. Reposition yourself by sitting down if talking for a while, whenever possible.

4. Be mindful of spaces and reduce barriers. When making plans, consider accessibility of spaces, parking, and restrooms for individuals in wheelchairs and get their input on how friendly a space truly is. Be a community advocate with individuals, for accessible spaces and include individuals in planning.

5. Use respectful language. It is fine to refer to a wheelchair or to use words like, walking, running, and going to describe movement. Try not to use limiting words and try to listen for the descriptors and language to describe a disability or difference that the person using a wheelchair prefers.

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