

How to Assist People with Disabilities

The MBL is committed to removing physical barriers and providing people with disabilities ready access to all of its facilities. When new buildings are erected or renovations made, they are designed in full compliance with the codes established by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). In addition, the MBL has an ADA Task Force that continually evaluates existing buildings and implements appropriate upgrades.

While the MBL continues to work at making its physical facilities accessible, it also remains committed to treating people with disabilities in a courteous and respectful way. The following are suggestions of the proper protocol for helping people with disabilities:

For individuals with hearing impairments

Speak slowly and pronounce your words clearly, but do not shout. Many individuals with hearing impairments can read lips or hear much of what you are saying so be certain to face them at all times when you are speaking. If you are using visual aids in a lecture or presentation, be careful not to turn your head away from your audience when referring to the information on the screen. If the lecture or presentation is in Lillie or Speck Auditorium, be sure to let people know that headphones are available to assist individuals with hearing impairments.

For individuals with hearing impairments using an interpreter

If someone with a hearing impairment is using an interpreter, speak directly to the person with the impairment and not to the interpreter. Always look at the person, even while the interpreter is talking.

For individuals with visual impairments

When speaking with someone with a visual impairment, face the person and speak clearly and distinctly. Many people with visual impairments have developed an acute sense of hearing to compensate for their loss of sight. Introduce yourself to them, even if you have met before, and introduce anyone else who comes into the room. Also, if you leave the room, tell them that you are going. If there are several people in the room when someone with a visual impairment arrives, tell the person where each individual is sitting as you introduce them. When you are walking with someone with a visual impairment, don't assume that they need your assistance. Always ask whether or not they want your help. If they do, ask them if they want to take your arm or would they prefer some other means of guidance.

For individuals with visual impairments using a seeing-eye dog

Seeing-eye dogs are highly trained working dogs and are welcomed in MBL buildings where other dogs are not. It is thoughtful to acknowledge the person's dog and ask its name, but remember seeing-eye dogs are not pets and should not be treated as such. Do not touch, pet, feed, or play with a seeing-eye dog unless you ask permission.

For individuals with mobility impairments

Ask the individual if they need assistance. Do not touch a wheelchair or move it without permission. When conversing with someone who uses a wheelchair, try to sit in a chair so that you are at eye level; do not make anyone have to look up at you for any length of time. You may offer the person a regular chair and offer to assist moving them into it.

For individuals with speech impairments

Be patient and wait for the person to finish speaking, rather than correcting or finishing the sentence yourself. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty; instead, repeat what you do understand and allow the person to respond. If you still don't understand, ask the person if it is acceptable to communicate in writing.