

10 COMMANDMENTS

For Communicating with Persons with Disabilities

Adapted by Karen Meyer for Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc.

- 1** When talking with a person who has a disability, speak directly to that person, use a typical tone and regular rate of speech, and offer to shake hands. (Shaking hands with the left is an acceptable greeting.)
- 2** When speaking with individuals with disabilities, avoid using negative or sensational descriptions, such as; "suffers from," "a victim of," or "afflicted with."
- 3** When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, remember to identify the person to whom you are speaking.
- 4** If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
- 5** Treat adults as adults. Address people who have disabilities by their first names only when extending that same familiarity to all others present. Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder.
- 6** Leaning or hanging on a person's wheelchair invades the personal body space of the person who uses it. When speaking with the individual, place yourself at eye level to facilitate the conversation.
- 7** Listen attentively when you're talking with a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. If necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod, or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. The response will clue you in and guide your understanding.
- 8** Don't portray people with disabilities as overly courageous, brave, special or superhuman. This implies that it is unusual for people with disabilities to have talents or skills.
- 9** To get the attention of a person who is hearing-impaired, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if the person can read your lips. Not all people with a hearing impairment can lip-read. For those who do lip-read, be sensitive to their needs by placing yourself facing the light source and keeping hands, cigarettes and food away from your mouth when speaking.
- 10** Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions, such as "See you later" or "Did you hear about this," that seem to relate to the person's disability.