

What not to do

Describe someone as ‘the disabled one’

Disabled people have names like everyone else. Their impairment isn't who they are. Ask someone their name and go from there.

Ask inappropriate questions

"Can you have sex?" is an awkward question for anyone. Disabled people often get bombarded with questions you wouldn't ask a complete stranger.

Start by getting to know a disabled person the same way you would anyone else. "How was your weekend?" "Rubbish weather, isn't it?" You get it.

Make assumptions

The person you're speaking to probably knows more about their impairment than you do. Not everyone in a wheelchair is paralysed, and not every disabled person knows sign language.

Many disabled people can drive, go to the gym, play football and have a night out just like everyone else. Remember everyone's different and can do different things.

Say “you don't look disabled”

People's impairments can't always be seen and aren't always physical. Don't expect disabled people to look or act a certain way.

Assume people want or need your help

You're trying to do a good thing, but wading in and giving help isn't always needed. Offer to help if it seems like someone would like some, but:

- Ask in what way you can help, and follow what they say. They're in charge
- Be cool if your offer is turned down

What do I call you?”

Every disabled person talks about their disability in a different way. Get to know them and you'll find out their preference. If you really need to know about their disability, the best way to ask is probably “how should I refer to your impairment?”.

Saying “let’s go for a walk” to a wheelchair user

Okay, so it’s a bit embarrassing, but it’s not the end of the world. Slips of the tongue happen all the time, so apologise or laugh it off, but don’t go too over the top. It’s rare for a wheelchair user to say “let’s go for a wheel around the park”.

“You’re so brave/inspiring/brilliant”

Disabled people do sometimes face barriers getting out and about, but be cool - wheeling out the “you’re so brave!” line is a bit patronising. Loads of disabled people lead really active lives.

Words to use when talking about disability

There are some words that many disabled people find hurtful or harsh because they:

- suggest disabled people are helpless
- are pitying
- are often used abusively.

Some disabled people may use controversial language when talking about themselves. That’s their choice, but it doesn’t mean they’d be happy for you to use it.

Overcompensate

Everyone appreciates a friendly welcome in the office but there’s no need to be overly-nice. Don’t make a fuss and just treat disabled people as you would anyone else.

Speak to the wrong person

Make sure you’re speaking to the disabled person, rather than their support worker or interpreter.

Questions, questions, questions

Disabled people sometimes get bombarded with questions about their condition. Get to know them for who they are instead. You wouldn’t dive straight into personal questions with anyone else at work, right?

Work drinks

We all have our favourite post-work pub, but make sure it’s a space disabled colleagues can access. A lot of pubs and bars don’t have ramps or lifts.

Communication problems

Having trouble understanding someone's speech? It's okay to ask them to repeat themselves as many times as you need. You can also use other ways to communicate, like pen and paper. Don't finish their sentences or pretend to understand.

Forget about access

Videos need captions for deaf and hard of hearing people. Lay out a meeting room so that a wheelchair user can move around easily. Make sure everything isn't on hard to reach top shelves.

Can you have sex?"

This is one of the most common awkward moments! Just because someone's disabled doesn't mean you can ask about their sex lives as soon as you meet them. Start with something less exciting and get to know them as you would anyone else.

"Disabled people have relationships?"

Yup. Disabled people date, use Tinder, have relationships, have sex, get married, have children, all that. Many have partners who aren't disabled. Some disabled people are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Just like everyone else.

"You're too hot to be disabled"

This might sound like a compliment, but it's really not. Don't expect disabled people to look a certain way. Disabled people like to dress sharp and look good like everyone else.