

## Disability Etiquette: Respect in Action

### Recommended Ages

Grades 3-8 (adaptable)

### Key Themes

Diversity of ability, respect, understanding, kindness, independence

### Materials Needed

- Scenario cards

### Learning Goals

- Students will understand what disability is (both visible and invisible)
- Students will develop a deeper understanding of respectful ways to interact with people with disabilities and how to be stronger allies
- Students will build empathy and inclusion skills
- Students will practice real-life etiquette

### Teaching Tips

- Keep the tone positive – not pity based.
- Emphasize that all people have dignity and independence
- Encourage questions in a safe, respectful way
- Avoid simulations that ‘mimic’ disabilities or exaggerate them – the focus of role plays should be on the person interacting and showing good etiquette, not the person with a disability

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## Lesson Instructions

### 1. Activity – ‘What Does Respect Look Like’?

#### Discussion Questions:

Ask students to help you brainstorm answers to the following questions:

1. What does ‘respect’ mean?
  - *Example answers: listening, kindness, not staring, helping, including*
2. What is ‘etiquette’?
  - *Sometimes called ‘manners’ – the social rules and expectations that help our interactions with others be respectful, considerate and comfortable*
  - *Rooted in kindness and empathy*
  - *The Golden Rule – treat others as you would like to be treated*
3. What do you think ‘disability etiquette’ might mean?

#### Teacher Talk:

**Disability etiquette** focuses on treating people with disabilities respect. It is about being polite and ensuring everyone feels comfortable, especially those that may face additional barriers or challenges. To start, let’s talk about disabilities in general.

### 2. Activity – ‘Understanding Disability: Visible vs Invisible’

#### Teacher Talk:

A **disability** is something that may affect how a person moves, learns, communicates or experiences the world. Some disabilities are ones you can see (visible) and others are ‘invisible’.

#### Mini-Activity

Explain that you are going to read out some disabilities. Ask the students to indicate if they think it is a ‘visible’ disabilities or an ‘invisible disability’ using silent gestures. For example, to vote for a ‘visible disability’, students can give a ‘thumbs up’. For ‘invisible disability’ students could cover their eyes. Ask students why they may have chosen one or the other.

- Mobility disabilities, such as using a walker or wheelchair
  - *(visible)*
- Being hard of hearing or deaf
  - *(can be visible if using hearing aids, cochlear implants or communicating via sign language but can be invisible as well)*

- Learning disabilities, like dyslexia
  - *(invisible)*
- Limb differences, such as an amputated leg
  - *(can be visible but not always – individual may be using a prosthetic, which may not be visible under clothing)*
- Physical differences, such as dwarfism
  - *(visible)*
- Autism
  - *(generally invisible)*

### **Bonus Teacher Talk for older grades:**

It's not always easy to identify disabilities. It's also possible for disabilities to be *dynamic*. This means that they might change or that our perception of them might change. Here are some examples:

- A child with autism may occasionally exhibit 'stimming' behaviour such as hand flapping, make their disability more obvious at times or be more impacted in certain environments, such as noisy places
- An individual with a mobility disability who uses a wheelchair may be able to walk short distances
- Individuals with mental health such as depression might have good days and more challenging days

### 3. Activity – Disability Etiquette: Core Principles.

Arrange students into groups of at least 3 or 4. Hand out a copy of the 'Disability Etiquette Multiple Choice' to each group. Ask students to work together to identify positive disability etiquette within the worksheets.

*Answers:* 1.a, 2.b, 3.c, 4.b, 5.a, 6.b, 7.c, 8.b.

Wrap up the activity by asking students to share their reflections or if any of the answers surprised them.

### 4. Activity – Respect in Action – Role Playing

Hand out the 'Scenario Role-Play' worksheets. You can assign groups a scenario or they can choose which one they would like to do. Give students a few minutes to organize themselves and practice acting out the scenarios – with *poor* disability etiquette and *positive* disability etiquette.

Watch groups to ensure that no students are mocking or offensively exaggerating a disability. The focus should be on the individual(s) who are displaying the disability etiquette, not on the disabled person in the scenario.

Ask each group to perform their scenario. First, the group will demonstrate the 'poor disability etiquette' provided in the handout. You can ask the group or the entire class why those actions were 'poor disability etiquette'.

### **Teacher notes for Discussion purposes:**

#### **Scenario 1**

Mobility devices, like wheelchairs, walkers and canes, are an extension of a person's body and personal space. Just like you should never touch another person without asking and making sure it is ok, you should never touch a person's mobility device or move them around unless they have given you permission. Always ask, before you help.

#### **Scenario 2**

Service dogs are working – they have an important job to do, whether that is helping guide a person with low vision, calm a person with autism or alert people to potential seizures or health problems. Distracting a service dog by touching it or feeding it can make it unable to do its job and leave the disabled person in an unsafe position.

#### **Scenario 3**

Guiding a person with low-vision is best done by verbally confirming they would like assistance and then offering your arm/elbow or shoulder to help guide them. Offer verbal warnings for things like changes in elevations or upcoming hazards but in a calm voice, rather than shouting.

#### **Scenario 4**

Do not make assumptions about an individual's ability to participate in an activity or exclude them. Ask them how they might like to participate and help them to understand the work being done. Ask open-ended questions or give them options if they need a bit more coaching.

#### **Scenario 5**

Transitions and changes in schedules can be really hard, especially for those on the autism spectrum. If a classmate is struggling, try to be empathetic and offer to help. You may be able to help them look at a visual schedule or can just encourage them by acknowledging how difficult change can be.

## 5. Wrap Up

Close out the lesson plan by reminding students that individuals with disabilities are experts in their own lives and support needs. Everyone – regardless of whether they have a disability or not – needs help sometimes. It's ok to offer help, but always ask first and respect that some people may say no. Try to avoid 'doing for' others and instead 'do with' them. Review the Golden Rule and ways that students can be respectful allies to individuals with disabilities.

## Disability Etiquette Multiple Choice

Instructions: Identify the answer that shows **positive** disability etiquette.

1. When working with a classmate who is hard of hearing, you should:
  - a. Face them and get their attention before speaking
  - b. Speak very, very slowly
  - c. Shout loudly to ensure they can hear you
  
2. If you overhear classmates, talking negatively about another student's disability, you should:
  - a. Remind your peers to be respectful or share what you heard with a teacher
  - b. Join in and make a joke
  - c. Avoid joining in and ignore them
  
3. When a classmate has a speech or language disability, you should
  - a. Help them out by finishing their sentences if you know what they are trying to say
  - b. Talk for them so they don't have to
  - c. Let them speak for themselves, even when it takes longer
  
4. When a new student with a visible disability joins your class, you should:
  - a. Immediately ask them personal questions about their disability to better understand them
  - b. Be welcoming and let them you know are happy to help if they ever need it
  - c. Avoid talking about their disability, so you do not accidentally say the wrong thing
  
5. If you don't understand what a classmate has said, you should:
  - a. Ask them to repeat themselves
  - b. Pretend you understood to avoid embarrassing them
  - c. Ask someone else to explain what they said
  
6. If you think a classmate may need help or is struggling, you should
  - a. Immediately help them by taking over the task and do it for them
  - b. Ask them if they need help
  - c. Tell someone else that they need help, like a teacher or Educational Assistant
  
7. In a school-wide activity, you are in a group with a student with a disability. You should:
  - a. Assume they cannot participate or will need a lot of help
  - b. Give them an easier task or make them the group 'mascot'
  - c. Ask them how they would like to be included or what they would like to do
  
8. You are curious about interacting with an autistic student and want to ask their Educational Assistant for information. You should:
  - a. Ask the EA while they are supporting the student
  - b. Find a private moment to talk to the EA and discuss if it would be ok for you to ask the student a particular question
  - c. Ask the autistic student personal questions directly while in class

## Scenario Role-Play

Read over the following scenarios. Your group will choose one scenario to act out in front of the class. First, you will showcase **poor disability etiquette**. Once your classmates have identified what you did 'wrong', you will re-do the scenario showing what you think **positive disability etiquette** would look like in this situation.

*Note:* avoid 'overacting' or mimicking people with disabilities in your presentation. The focus should be on the person(s) who is demonstrating *poor* or *positive* disability etiquette.

### Scenario 1

You (person A) are walking down the hall with a friend(s) (person B) when you see a student in a wheelchair (person C) struggling to open a heavy door.

*Poor disability etiquette:* You (person A) run up to the student (person C) and begin to swing the door open. Your friend (person B) moves the student (person C) aside and then pushes them into the room.

### Scenario 2

A visitor to the school arrives with their Service Dog.

*Poor disability etiquette:* you and your friends immediately run up to the dog and start petting it, saying how cute it is and asking if you can give it a treat.

### Scenario 3

There is a student visiting your school who is visually impaired and uses a white cane. They ask you to help them travel to another classroom.

*Poor disability etiquette:* You and your friends go ahead of them, shouting out instructions and moving objects out of the way to try and help them navigate.

### Scenario 4

You are in a group of students who have been assigned to present a topic. One of the students has an intellectual disability.

*Poor disability etiquette:* You and the group members assume the student with a disability is unable to participate in the project and do not include them in conversations to pick a topic or assign them a role.

### Scenario 5

Your school usually follows a standard schedule but today, there is an unexpected event happening. A student in your class with autism is struggling with the disruption to the schedule and appears anxious.

*Poor disability etiquette:* You and your friends tell them that it is not a big deal, that there is no reason for them to get upset and that they 'just need to calm down'.