

# Wheelchair Etiquette

(As written by Disability Awareness, The Rehabilitation Center, Ottawa Ontario -  
(613)739-5324)

- Always ask the person using the wheelchair if he or she would like assistance BEFORE you help. It may not be needed or wanted.
- Don't hang or lean on a person's wheelchair because it is part of that person's personal body space.
- Speak directly to the person in the wheelchair, not to someone nearby as if the person in the wheelchair did not exist.
- If conversation lasts more than a few minutes, consider sitting down or kneeling to get yourself on the same level.
- Don't demand or patronize the person by patting them on the head.
- Give clear directions, including distance, weather conditions and physical obstacles that may hinder the person's travel.
- Don't classify persons who use wheelchairs as sick. Wheelchairs are used for a variety of non-contagious disabilities.
- When a person using a wheelchair "transfers" out of the wheelchair to a chair, toilet, car or bed, do not move the wheelchair out of reaching distance.
- Be aware of the person's capabilities. Some users can walk with aid and use wheelchairs to save energy and move quickly.
- It is ok to use terms like "running along" when speaking to a person who uses a wheelchair. The person is likely to express things the same way.
- Don't discourage children from asking questions about the wheelchair.
- Don't assume that using a wheelchair is in itself a tragedy. It is a means of freedom that allows the person to move about independently.