

DISABILITY ETIQUETTE 101 for the Women's Marches

1. LANGUAGE

- Use direct language: person with a disability or disabled person
- NOT handicapped, not crippled
- Avoid cutesy alternatives: NOT differently abled, not physically challenged
- NOT special needs
- NOT wheelchair bound. We're wheelchair users
- NOT crazy, psycho, lunatic, stupid, retarded
- Our use of in-group language doesn't give you permission to use it

2. DON'T TOUCH US WITHOUT ASKING

- That includes touching our wheelchairs, walkers or other equipment
- Don't pat us on the head or shoulder or hand or anywhere else
- Don't take our photos without our permission

3. ASK BEFORE YOU "HELP"

- Don't assume we're struggling or need help
- Check your assumptions about what constitutes "struggling"
- Don't infantilize us
- Don't assume that the reason we approach you as a peacekeeper is because of our disability

4. IF WE ACCEPT AN OFFER OF HELP. DON'T ASSUME THAT YOU KNOW WHAT WE NEED

- Don't substitute your judgment for ours
- Wait to be told what we need
- Again, don't grab us or our equipment without permission
- How could I be most helpful right now?

5. WE ARE NOT OUR DISABILITIES

- Don't try to connect with us around the disability
- Don't ask me questions about my equipment unless you have an actual need to know
- Don't ask intrusive or personal questions

6. BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED MARCHERS

- Identify yourself and your role
- Describe what's going on
- Don't grab our arm to guide us, let us take yours
- All the same rules about not touching or helping without permission apply

7. DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING MARCHERS

- Don't shout
- Talk to the us, not the interpreter
- Make eye contact before you start
- Don't assume lip-reading, but also don't cover your mouth when speaking
- Always have a paper and pen handy so that you can communicate in writing
- Know where the Deaf seating area is at the rally, where the interpreters will be, in case you're asked

8. INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

- Don't assume that someone using a service doesn't need it because she doesn't "look disabled"
- Hidden disabilities can range from heart disease to MS to bi-polar disorder to chronic fatigue to environmental illness

9. SENSORY PROCESSING/ANXIETY/AUTISM AND SIMILAR CONDITIONS

A march or rally can be overwhelming for anyone; it can be almost impossible for women with sensory processing issues. We may seem rude, detached or unresponsive when we may just be trying to make sense of all that incoming data. Imagine standing in the middle of a crowded circus midway with flashing lights, loud noises and lots of people and trying to understand what someone is instructing you to do.

- Don't yell at us; it will just make us feel more overwhelmed
- If possible, step aside out of the crowd to quieter space.
- Be calm and ask if you need to repeat what you said.
- Don't touch or grab us to "help" us to understand.

10. MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITIES/ENVIRONMENTAL ILLNESS

- Don't wear perfume or cologne,
- Don't use scented soaps or hair products
- Wash your clothes with fragrance-free detergent, fabric softener
- Don't touch us without permission, since you may transfer substances to us or our clothes that make us sick.

11. SERVICE DOGS

- Don't pet them
- Don't ask to pet them. They're working and it's exhausting for us to field constant requests
- Don't try to bond with us around them (unless you're considering getting one yourself)

12. PET PEEVES

- Touching me or my stuff without permission
- Talking to the person with me instead of to me
- Assuming that my girlfriend/boyfriend/spouse is my caregiver
- Complimenting me on how well I wheel/walk/get around
- Complimenting me on being able to do mundane tasks

RESOURCES:

On how to be fragrance-free/environmentally safe:

<https://eastbaymeditation.org/resources/fragrance-free-at-ebmc/>

Disability-related blogs and websites:

twothirdsoftheplanet.com
disabilityvisibilityproject.com
nicolagriffith.com
wordsiwheelby.com
badcripple.blogspot.com

A wonderful essay on disability: Nancy Mairs, "On Being a Cripple"

thelamedame.tumblr.com/post/30938417648/on-being-a-cripple