

# medina county board of developmental disabilities

## - Supporting People with Developmental Differences in our Community -



## Community Spaces

*Realizing a thriving community is diverse and includes all different types of people is important. Looking at ways to provide services and facilities which help people with developmental differences feel a “part” instead of “apart” from things is important to supporting and developing inclusion.*

Like anyone else in the community, taking a trip to a favorite community destination, like a rec center, library, or park, is important for many people with developmental differences. They also want places to continue learning, sharing, and growing intellectually throughout their lives. Public spaces, which are vital resources for all citizens, play a significant leadership role in inclusion efforts for people with varying abilities. They are in unique positions to show how people with developmental differences can and should be included in everyday community life.

Truth be told, programming and customer service to this population may make those who staff community spaces feel uncomfortable - mostly due to unsure expectations or fear.

In general, the behavior of people with disabilities should be guided by the facilities policy on behavior for all its

visitors. Safe, public places where all visitors are welcome are important, and public and community spaces are some of the few places where individuals can spend unstructured time. While attention should be given to the needs of people with disabilities, this population should be treated with the same expectations, respect and humanity extended to all visitors. Yes, at times flexibility and understanding may be needed in regard to behaviors that may be distracting or are most certainly unintentional or not within an ability to control, but the basic expectations of behavior and respect should remain the same.

What about other visitors? Much of the discomfort people feel about disability stems from a lack of understanding. Not enough people know a person with a disability – nearly half (43%) of the public say they do not. Research shows both the general public and people with disabilities believe more everyday interactions will increase understanding, acceptance

and inclusion. That is why inclusive community spaces are the perfect places to lead the way in creating environments and opportunities for people to get to know each other. While it's still surprising how few community opportunities exist for inclusion of people with developmental disabilities, they are critical to helping our community understand and accept people with disabilities.



# - 3 Things to Remember -

In working or being with children and adults with developmental differences, you may come across situations that are uncomfortable or awkward. Keep in mind the goal is not to change people, but rather to help them understand ways they can better interact within the general expectations of community space.



## 1 Be Consistent

No matter who the person is (customer, visitor, friend, co-worker), we can ALL support people in positive ways. Consistency is important in working with people with developmental differences. Keep your word! Follow through on needed actions and what you promise. Being genuine and direct. If you have policies about behavior, follow them for all visitors, regardless of ability.

## 2 Keep it Simple

This doesn't mean that you do not discuss complex ideas with the person with a development difference; what it does mean is using language that is easy to understand and clarifies with the person their understanding of what we have said.

- Use clear and concrete language.
- Use short sentences that communicate one main idea.
- Use concrete, direct instructions: do not suggest or imply.
- Avoid jargon, acronyms, and abbreviations.
- Check for understanding. After each piece of information ask, What do you think about this? etc. Ask the person to reflect back to you their understanding of what needs to happen.

## 3 Set Expectations

We often do a disservice by treating people who have a developmental difference in other ways than we would our friends or those we come in contact with in the community. It is a disservice because it provides no example of what would be correct, but may also perpetuate situations which support undesirable behaviors. Point out the behavior in a caring way and provide an example of what would be a better way to handle the situation. This list of tips is provided to help you handle some of these situations.

A male adult is leering at you. Respond by approaching the person and say in a firm voice "It makes me uncomfortable when you stare at me, please stop." Or, "I don't like it when you look at me that way."

A person approaches you for a hug and this doesn't feel right. Stop the person by extending your arms to their shoulders and take their hand for a handshake. Say, "Let's shake hands instead, because I don't know you very well."

A person whom you've just met says, "I like you, you can be my girlfriend/boyfriend." Respond with, "I would like to be friends, but I don't feel that way about our friendship." If you already have a girlfriend/boyfriend, say so. This response may produce some pouting. Don't give attention to the pouting, your response is a reasonable one.

A person at an activity is standing very close to you or following you around. Respond with "Please don't stand so close to me, please don't follow me, I don't like it." Physically show the person how close to stand (usually arms length is a good guide).

Help people become aware when their voices are too loud. Model appropriate voice levels.

A person may ask you something personal that you don't feel comfortable talking about. Let the person know that this is too personal to talk about, that you usually talk about personal things with people you know well. "I don't feel comfortable talking about that with you right now, maybe when we get to know each other better, we can talk about things that are personal."

**Struggling? Call in a Professional!** If you find you are struggling with a particular person or situation, then call in a professional to help. By working together, you can create a plan of action based on an assessment of the situation. The plan will help address challenging behavior and also include understanding the strengths, preferences and interests of the individual and the environment while providing recommended steps which may be needed to reach the goal that is to be achieved. Reach out to the Medina County Board of DD Individual Positive Supports staff at 330-725-7751 ext. 304.