

2023

Handbook

FOR WELCOMING & SUPPORTING PEOPLE
WITH DISABILITIES



m | m
opemuseum

m

Brussels
Museums

Handbook for welcoming & supporting people with disabilities

Whatever the impairment or disability, the able-bodied person must see "a person" in front of them. Disability becomes a particularity, an accessory that must be taken into account.

There are 7 types of disability (wheelchair users, people who have difficulties walking, the deaf, the hearing-impaired, the blind, the visually impaired, people who have difficulties understanding).

General rule :

- Always ask first! ex. "Hey, my name is ..., do you need some help ?/ may I help you with something? "
- Be respectful
- Do not infantilize them
- Speak to the person directly and not to the person accompanying them

If the person says yes, here are some tips on how you can help them.

A person who uses a wheelchair

Before handling a wheelchair:

- Ask them if they need help. (do not touch the wheelchair without the person's consent!)
- If they say yes, find out how you can help them, as certain actions can sometimes cause them more pain than if they were to manage on their own.
- If you do not feel able to accompany the person (because of the slope), ask for assistance. Do not put yourself or the visitor in danger.

NB: If you are talking to the person for a long time, get down to their level.

If you have to push them, check/ask if they are sitting comfortably and safely in their seat:

- Resting on the back of the seat.
- If there is a seatbelt, it needs to be fastened.
- Feet are firmly planted on the footrests (check that the straps too).
- No clothing should be blocking or in danger of being caught in the wheels.
- Personal bags hung on the back of the seat or the knees (risk of falling).

NB: a wheelchair user needs a path of 93cm to go straight, and 150cm to be able to turn easily.

A person who has difficulties walking (crutches/ cane)

People on crutches need more space to move around. Even if they are used to it, there is a greater risk of them becoming unbalanced and falling. The risk of falling in the rain is increased. Obstacles on the ground (gravel, paving stones, cables) can lead to the risk of falling.

- If mats are installed to facilitate the movement of these obstacles, you must ensure that they are kept in place.
- Be alert to signs of fatigue and offer to help overcome certain obstacles (a few steps, for example). However, you must remain aware of your abilities (adapting your walking pace, being able to support the person) to avoid endangering yourself or the person who has difficulty walking.

People who have difficulties walking tire quickly, so make sure you adapt your speed to theirs and take breaks if necessary.

- Ask the museum if it has chairs for people to sit on.
- Be aware of areas with seating so that you can inform the public about them.
- If the museum has mobility equipment (wheelchair, cane chair) available, offer it to the visitor.

Visually impaired people (blind and partially sighted)

People with a white cane and/or a guide dog can get around on their own if they know the area, but during Museum Night Fever a lot of things move around, and the layout of the area changes. A blind or partially-sighted person may ask you to direct or guide them to a specific stand or service.

Offer to guide them as follows:

- Offer the person your elbow or shoulder. They will hold on to it and walk slightly behind you.
- Ask for confirmation of your walking pace. When you slow down, the person will be alert to an obstacle or maneuver.
- When you go up or down a step, stop for a few seconds. Your elbow or shoulder will make the same movement. The blind person will feel the movement and understand that there is an obstacle.
- In narrower spaces, put your arm behind your back, the person will feel the movement and move behind you.
- When walking, don't hesitate to describe the route to the person, this may be useful if they are familiar with the building outside the event and can still visualize the route taken. It is also important to point out any obstacles such as holes, work to be avoided, and the number of steps. Check that the person is safe in the passageway or traffic area.

- Tell the person that you are at the destination. Do not leave them without warning them ex. "We are at X, do you need anything else? If not, I will be on my way. Have a good evening."
- To seat a blind person: simply take the person's hand and place it on the back of the chair. They will discover the chair for themselves and find the best way to sit down.
- In front of a door (ex. to the toilet): tell the person you are guiding if the door opens inwards or outwards. Go through the door with your partner on the "hinge" side. Open the door with the guiding hand and let your partner touch the handle, go through the door, and close it.
- When a person is traveling with a guide dog, do not distract/caress the dog. Ask the museum if there is a doggie bar and where it is located.

Be careful: the blind person feels safe because they trust you completely. You become their eyes.

People with a hearing impairment (hard of hearing and deaf)

Hearing-impaired people are fitted with hearing aids. Others, the profoundly deaf, only feel vibrations, bass, or treble. Some hearing-impaired people or deaf people can lip-read and sometimes speak.

In an outdoor or noisy environment, such as Museum Night Fever, hearing-impaired people may feel excluded. They may need to move to a quieter space to reduce the amount of stimuli.

To communicate with these people :

- Start by adapting the rhythm of your speech. If the person can lip-read, they will be able to understand the information. If the person has difficulty understanding you, change your sentence by articulating rather than repeating it. By changing the words, you will change the "lip images".
- Don't speak against the light (strong sunlight) or in the dark, as this makes lip-reading impossible.
- You must remain within the person's field of vision so that you are speaking directly to them.
- If the person doesn't understand you, you can use gestures or mime explanations. They can replace, complement and accompany speech.
- Your facial expression plays an important role in communicating with the deaf. Your face can express feelings (joy, sadness...), modalities (astonishment, doubt...), and syntax (refusal, question...) so that the deaf person can follow the communication more easily.

- If necessary, don't hesitate to use written support, but use simple words and phrases.
- Do not use complicated vocabulary.
- Deaf people need to see your eyes, to know you're talking to them.
- Don't talk with your hand in front of your mouth.
- Speak normally, not too fast or too slow.
- Be sure to articulate without exaggerating (no need to grimace), otherwise, the words will be distorted.
- A deaf person will find it very difficult to follow a conversation between several people, so point out the person who is speaking so that they can direct their gaze in that person's direction.

People with an intellectual disability

Intellectual disability is a disability that affects understanding, communication, and decision-making. As a general rule, people with intellectual disabilities have difficulty situating themselves in space and time. They, therefore, have varying degrees of autonomy.

To communicate with these people:

- Smile to put the other person at ease, introduce yourself and speak normally using simple sentences (avoid unnecessary details).
- Be patient, adapt your pace of speech, and don't hesitate to rephrase if necessary.
- Take the time to listen and understand, and don't try to finish their sentences before they do.
- Only talk to the carer as a last resort.
- You can use written support or pictograms to make communication easier.
- If you are in a group, it is advisable to identify the person who will act as the interface.
- To guide them, be aware that directions are difficult to understand. Make sure that the person has understood the directions or, better still, accompany them. In this case, offer to accompany them,
- Don't be afraid to make contact: People with intellectual (mental) disabilities tend to be very affectionate. Don't be afraid, just agree to give them a kiss or a handshake.

Contact

Your team leader

Accessibility coordinator