



**DISABILITY  
RIGHTS UNITS**

# PHYSICAL IMPAIREMENTS

**ENVISION2030**

transparency • honesty • integrity • respect • accountability  
fairness • professionalism • commitment • compassion • excellence

**CREATIVE. DISTINCTIVE. IMPACTFUL.**





# PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENTS

## Rules of etiquette when talking to a person making use of a wheelchair:

- The first rule of etiquette when interacting with people in wheelchairs or power chairs is to remember that one should not focus on their disability. Instead, focus on the person.
- Respect a person's dignity, individuality and desire for independence.
- Always ask the person using the wheelchair if they would like assistance before you help them. It may not be needed or wanted.
- A person's wheelchair is part of their body space and should be treated with respect. Remember that people who use wheelchairs have varying capabilities. Some people who use wheelchairs can walk with aid or for short distances. They use a wheelchair because it helps them to conserve energy and to move about with greater efficiency.
- Don't classify or think of people who use wheelchairs as "sick". Wheelchairs are used to help people adapt to or compensate for the mobility impairments that result from many non-contagious impairments.
- Don't pet guide dogs or other service animals as they are working animals.
- It is appropriate to shake hands with a person who has a disability, even if they have limited use of their hands or wear an artificial limb.



where the bathroom is and has access to it.

- Rearrange furniture to create a clear path for wheelchairs.
- Don't hang or lean on a person's wheelchair. Again, remember that 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 does not exist.**

- Don't belittle or patronise 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.
- 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.
- It is okay 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 assume that using a wheelchair is in itself a tragedy. It is a means of freedom that allows the person to move about independently.
- Only push or lean on a wheelchair with permission.
- Yield and give way to wheelchairs on the move.

- If your conversation lasts more than a few minutes, consider sitting down or kneeling to get yourself on the same eye level as the person who uses the wheelchair. It will keep both of you from getting a stiff neck.
- If you have children, they will stare as it's their nature. Talk to the child about people with disabilities, and help them understand why people use wheelchairs. Don't discourage children from asking questions of a person who uses a wheelchair about their wheelchair. Open communication helps overcome fearful or misleading attitudes.
- Bathroom breaks matter. If you plan a gathering or meeting and observe someone in a wheelchair, ensure the person knows



Although the DUT is actioning a plan to phase in the retrofitting of inaccessible surfaces and buildings, people with physical disabilities often encounter a lot of obstacles when it comes to their physical environment as a result of a lack of accessible and wheelchair-friendly routes and entrances. This often leads to exclusion and isolation for most people living with physical disabilities. It is important to keep in mind that a person with a physical disability is a human being. They are not their disability or their wheelchair,







## KEEP IN TOUCH

**We aim to provide holistic support to DUT students with disabilities.**

**You can reach the Disability Rights Unit:**

**Visit us on your campus**

**Steve Biko Campus: Student Counseling and Health Unit (Durban)**

**Riverside Block J: Student Counseling and Health Unit (Pietermaritzburg)**

**Call us:**

**0313732551**

**Send us an email**

**Email : [DisabilityruDBN@dut.](mailto:DisabilityruDBN@dut.ac.za)**

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