

INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Fear of doing the wrong thing can affect interactions between people with and without disabilities. Review the TEAM Belong handouts, Guidelines for Clergy, Ushers and Lay Leaders and How You Can Make a Difference, to familiarize yourself with basic disability etiquette. Then use the suggestions below to help overcome fears and raise your comfort level when interacting with people of different abilities.

The 4D Approach to Reacting to Disability Differences

- **Detecting**: noticing a disability difference and recognizing your internal feelings and thoughts in order to circumvent anxiety or the urge to freeze or escape when encountering a disability difference.
- **Deciding**: deciding the nature of the disability, how relevant the disability is to the current situation, what your action options are and choosing the most useful actions for the situation.
- **Doing**: Behaving according to your plan.
- **Debriefing**: Reflecting on what worked and what didn't and how to act next time.

Using the above steps takes only seconds. When you feel unsure of yourself, the 4D Approach will help lower your anxiety level and will help you interact more comfortably with people who happen to have disabilities. Soon you will serve as a role model for others who may feel uncomfortable relating to people who appear different than they do.

What do you say when you meet a person with a disability? How about, 'Hello?'

TEAM Belong Handout Guidelines for Clergy, Ushers and Lay Leaders

Source: Nancy B. Miller and Catherine C. Sammons, Everybody's Different: Understanding and Changing Our Reactions to Disabilities. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 1999.