

Do's and Don'ts

OF WELCOMING PATRONS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Do: talk directly to the person with the disability, even if it seems likely that their caregiver will need to be the one to give you information.

Don't: talk through the caregiver. Many people with disabilities can understand you and want to be spoken to directly.

Do: use an age-appropriate, friendly tone, even when speaking to a person with limited verbal skills.

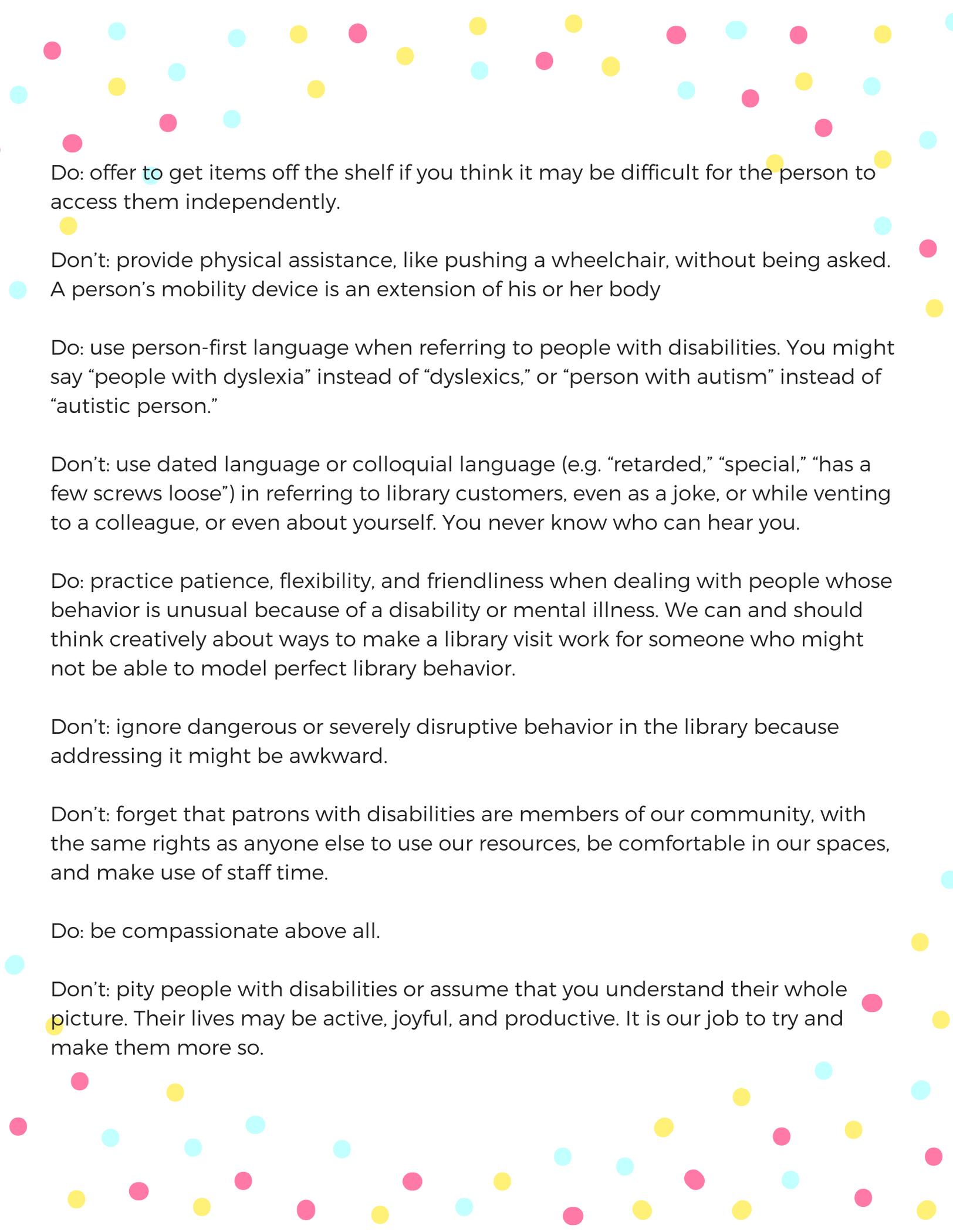
Don't: use babyish or sing-song language when speaking to older children, teens and adults, even if they have language difficulties. Assume that the person has full comprehension, at least until you get to know them.

Do: ask questions and make conversation. Forming a personal connection will make the library a warm, welcoming, and beloved place to visit.

Don't: Don't assume that people want to talk about their disability or the tools they use to manage it.

Do: try your best to remove physical barriers between yourself and a customer who uses a wheelchair/power chair, especially for longer interactions. If it works in the moment, get a chair and sit down next to their chair so that you can talk face-to-face.

Don't: peer down from a desk that's much taller than the customer seated in his or her wheelchair (whenever you can avoid it).



Do: offer to get items off the shelf if you think it may be difficult for the person to access them independently.

Don't: provide physical assistance, like pushing a wheelchair, without being asked. A person's mobility device is an extension of his or her body

Do: use person-first language when referring to people with disabilities. You might say "people with dyslexia" instead of "dyslexics," or "person with autism" instead of "autistic person."

Don't: use dated language or colloquial language (e.g. "retarded," "special," "has a few screws loose") in referring to library customers, even as a joke, or while venting to a colleague, or even about yourself. You never know who can hear you.

Do: practice patience, flexibility, and friendliness when dealing with people whose behavior is unusual because of a disability or mental illness. We can and should think creatively about ways to make a library visit work for someone who might not be able to model perfect library behavior.

Don't: ignore dangerous or severely disruptive behavior in the library because addressing it might be awkward.

Don't: forget that patrons with disabilities are members of our community, with the same rights as anyone else to use our resources, be comfortable in our spaces, and make use of staff time.

Do: be compassionate above all.

Don't: pity people with disabilities or assume that you understand their whole picture. Their lives may be active, joyful, and productive. It is our job to try and make them more so.