

# “A re amohelaneng”



**A Practical Guide to Interacting  
with People with Disabilities**





## **Do you feel nervous or embarrassed about speaking to people with disabilities, perhaps worried about accidentally causing offence?**

Many non-disabled people feel ill at ease when interacting with people with disabilities, but there are some simple rules that can help. This guide will help you to interact with people with disabilities in a sensitive and appropriate manner. It also provides tips about the kind of language to use when talking about disability - which words are appropriate and which are offensive.



# THE GOLDEN RULES:

## **1 RESPECT AND COURTESY**

Treat people with disabilities as you would like to be treated - with respect, dignity and courtesy. Think of the person first, not their disability.

## **2 AVOID SHOWING PITY OR BEING PATRONIZING**

A person with a disability isn't a victim, so don't treat them like one. Avoid showing pity or being patronizing. For example, it is very disrespectful to pat a person with a disability on the head or talk down to them as though they were children. If you meet a disabled adult, talk to them like an adult! A person's impairment may prompt your concern - but don't restrict their freedom.

## **3 THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK**

The language you use about people with disabilities may cause great offence if it is inappropriate. Avoid language that you know is rude or derogatory. When talking about people, refer to them by their name rather than their impairment. Please see page ?? for more information about appropriate language about disability.

## **4** ***ALWAYS ASK BEFORE GIVING HELP***

Just because a person has a disability, they don't necessarily need or want your assistance. Never help someone without first asking them. If you offer assistance, always do what the person asks, not what you think is best.

## **5** ***SPEAK TO THE INDIVIDUAL***

When you interact with people with disabilities speak directly to the individual, not to their companions, aides, or sign language interpreters.

## **6** ***DON'T STARE***

Try not to stare if something about the person seems unusual to you – while many disabled people are used to being looked at, staring will make anybody self-conscious and uncomfortable.

## **7** ***JUST RELAX***

Don't shy away from people with disabilities - relax and be yourself! Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use common expressions such as "see you later" or "did you hear about that?" that seem to relate to a person's disability. Don't be afraid to ask questions when you're unsure of what to do.

**On the next page is some ways to interact with people with specific types of disabilities:**

# Interacting with people with physical disabilities

- When speaking with a person who uses a wheelchair or crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of them to facilitate the conversation.
- Just as you wouldn't lean on a person you are talking to, don't lean on someone's wheelchair or other mobility appliance. The wheelchair is part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.
- Do not assume an individual in a wheelchair wants to be pushed - ask first.
- When introduced to a person with a disability, feel free to offer to shake hands like you might with any non-disabled person. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands, but shaking with the left hand is also an acceptable greeting.
- Be considerate about the pace in which you walk; don't leave someone behind by walking off too quickly.
- If you are walking with a person with a physical disability and come across an obstacle, try to move whatever is in their way rather than the person themselves.
- If you are asked to carry someone, check with them where you should hold them (or their wheelchair/appliance).



For further information about interacting with people with physical disabilities, please contact:

**Lesotho National Association  
of the Physically Disabled (LNAPD)**

Address: Moshoeshoe II, PO Box 7289, Maseru 100.

Tel/Fax: 22320366

## Interacting with Deaf people

When you interact with someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing, remember that some individuals may be able to hear, some may be able to lip read, while others prefer to use sign language or assistive technology. Ask them how they prefer to communicate.

- Treat people with respect. If the telephone rings or there is a knock at the door while you are talking to a Deaf per-

son, excuse yourself and explain what you are doing. Don't leave them sitting there with no explanation.

- Get the person's attention before speaking – by calling their name, touching their arm or waving.
- Speak slowly, clearly and expressively – but don't shout as this will make it much harder to lip-read.
- Look directly at the person and maintain eye contact.
- Don't cover your mouth or put anything in it while talking.
- Use short and simple sentences, and use gestures, body language and facial expressions to help get your message across.
- Even if you are communicating through a sign language interpreter, it is important to remember that you are still talking to the Deaf person.
- Remember that sign languages are languages in their own right – for many Deaf people, their first language is a signlanguage. Different countries have different sign languages, and in many cases different regions have their own dialects, as with spoken language. Learning some simple signs, such as greetings, is a basic courtesy like learning any other language.

If you are communicating by writing things down, use short sentences or phrases, write legibly and clearly (printing each letter separately is usually best) and use drawings and diagrams to get your message across.





For more information about interacting  
with Deaf People please contact:

**The National Association of the Deaf Lesotho (NADL)**

Address: 22 Mabile Road, Old Europa,  
PO Box 13821, Maseru 100.

Tel: 22320345, Fax: 22326196, E-mail: [deafles@leo.co.ls](mailto:deafles@leo.co.ls)

## Interacting with people with visual impairments

Speak directly to the person rather than their assistant or guide, and speak normally and clearly. Remember that people with visual impairments do not necessarily get the extra information that you may take for granted – so always explain what is going on:

- Tell the person when you arrive and when you leave.
- Always introduce yourself by name and explain why you are there.
- When you first speak to the person, a gentle touch on their arm lets them know that you are talking to them; a handshake helps orient the person as to where you are.
- If you are in a group, explain who else is with you. Identify yourself each time you speak.
- Use the person's name often, to make it clear when you are speaking to them.
- Be specific in giving directions. Do not say 'over there' or 'over here'. Instead say 'on your left or right' or 'immediately behind' or 'in front of you'.
- When a blind or visually impaired person arrives at a new place, tell them who is there, and offer to describe the environment. Make sure that you describe any obstacles or hazards, and whether there are any children or animals around.
- Do not leave the person alone in the centre of a room. Make sure they can touch a table, chair or wall to maintain orientation to their surroundings.
- Be safety conscious, but don't limit the person's freedom. Move the obstacles, not the person.

## **Guiding a blind or visually impaired person**

- Always ask the person if they would like assistance first; never take someone's arm or hand without warning.
- Offer your arm for the person to hold just above the elbow. This will allow them to walk slightly behind you, following you as you turn or step up or down.



For more information about interacting with people with visual impairments, please contact:

**Lesotho National League for  
Visually Impaired Persons (LNLVIP)**

Address: Room 501, 5th Floor, Ministry of Health and  
Social Welfare, PO Box 262, Maseru West 105.

Tel/Fax: 22324997, E-mail: [lnvip@tlmail.co.ls](mailto:lnvip@tlmail.co.ls)

- Walk normally – not too slow and definitely not too fast.
- Whenever you come to a turn, a step or an obstacle, pause and tell the person what is coming.
- Don't try to sit them down – just guide one hand to the back or arm of a chair, or to the edge of a table.

# Interacting with people with mental or intellectual disabilities

Be sensitive to the individual needs and behaviour of people with mental disabilities. Find out each person's preferred way of communicating (how they like to speak and be spoken to, how they like to be touched or not). Sometimes people with mental difficulties may behave in unusual or surprising ways. Be sensitive to how you behave and how your actions might cause someone to react – don't panic or respond aggressively. People with intellectual difficulties may take more time to understand or respond to what they hear, whilst some may find it difficult to concentrate. In general:

- Speak normally and clearly, using simple and short words
- Use short sentences and express one point at a time – people with learning difficulties may find it difficult to remember a list of different things.
- If you aren't making yourself understood, repeat yourself once. If this doesn't work, try again using different words.
- Use more closed questions with clear options, rather than an open question with many possible answers.
- Be patient with them and give them time to communicate with you.
- If you are in a public area with many distractions, consider moving to a quiet or private location. Be patient, flexible and supportive. Take time to understand the individual and make sure the individual understands you.



For more information about interacting with people with mental and intellectual disabilities, please contact:

**Lesotho Society of Mentally Handicapped Persons (LSMHP)**

Address: Government House No. 72, Stadium Area,  
PO Box 9204, Maseru 100.

Tel: 22320407, Fax: 22322462, E-mail: [ismhp@ismhp.org.ls](mailto:ismhp@ismhp.org.ls)

## The Language of Disability

Many of the 'labels' used to describe disability are considered inappropriate and offensive by people with disabilities themselves. Yet positive language empowers. When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is important to put the person first. Group descriptions such as "the blind," "the retarded" or "the disabled" are inappropriate because they do not reflect the individuality, equality or dignity of

people with disabilities. Further, words like “normal person” imply that the person with a disability isn’t normal. Below are some examples of language which is considered offensive by people with disabilities, and suggestions for more appropriate terms.

## ENGLISH

<b><i>Offensive</i></b>	<b><i>Appropriate</i></b>
Deformed, cripple, lame	Person who has a physical disability
Handicapped	Person with a disability
Insane, deranged, deviant, crazy	Person with a mental illness
Midget, dwarf	Person who is small in stature
Deaf and dumb, deaf mute	Deaf person
Mongoloid	Person who has Down Syndrome
Retarded, mentally defective	Person with an intellectual/mental disability
Normal	Non-disabled, able-bodied

## SESOTHO

<b><i>Offensive</i></b>	<b><i>Appropriate</i></b>
Semumu/Setholo	Motho ea nang le bokooa ba puo le kutlo
Seqhoala	Motho ea nang le bokooa ba masapo
Lehlanya	Motho ea nang le bokuli ba kelello / lefu la kelello
Sefofu	Motho ea nang le bokooa ba pono
Sehole	Motho ea nang le bokooa ba kelello
Seritsa	Motho ea sa tsebang ho tsamaea



LNFOOD is a partner of a Skillshare International project which aims to challenge negative attitudes towards people with disabilities and establish policy and legislation to protect the rights of the disabled. The project is funded by the European Commission.



**Lesotho National Federation of  
Organisations of the Disabled  
(LNFOOD)**

22 Mabile Road  
PO Box 9988  
Maseru 100  
Lesotho

Tel: 22320345  
Fax: 22326196  
E-mail: [lnfod@lesoff.co.za](mailto:lnfod@lesoff.co.za)

**Skillshare International Lesotho  
42B United Nations Rd**

PO Box 269  
Maseru 100  
Lesotho

Tel: 22314202  
Fax: 22310156  
Website: [www.skillshare.org](http://www.skillshare.org)