



LAKESHORE



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- *Nationally, Alabama ranks fifth-highest in disability prevalence by population.*
- *In Jefferson County, over 30% of households have an individual with a disability, while in Blount County this figure is over 40%, just to name a few.*
- *As a nation, 54 million Americans, or approximately one out of every five people, have a disability.*
- *Over one billion people worldwide have a disability!*
- *People with disability are our nation's largest minority group.*

My name is Amy Rauworth and I am the Director of Policy and Public Affairs at Lakeshore Foundation. I provide advocacy for individuals with disability to organizations across the United States. Our work in advocacy and policy is focused on our strategic initiative which is to achieve health equity for people with physical disability and chronic health conditions by ensuring people with disability gain access to health promoting resources and receive the right support services, at the right time, in the right setting. This work addresses the consequences of environmental, social and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disability from maximum participation in society. Our goal is to educate organizations on how to speak with and about individuals with a disability. As a media outlet I know you are well aware of the power of your words. Using outdated or offensive language can create a firestorm within this community, as well as set inappropriate notions about who individuals with disability really are.

I have put together a small packet to help you be a leader in the community when it comes to talking with and about individuals with disability. Your words have the ability to educate and empower this community for the better, as well as to change the lives and perspectives of individuals with disability. Birmingham is on the leading edge when it comes to disability inclusion in public health, recreation, and research. With all of this in our backyard, our media outlets should not be found wanting when representing or highlighting these attributes of our city.

I hope you find these resources helpful. If you have any further questions or resource needs please feel free to contact me. I am often asked to provide guidance on appropriate verbiage and etiquette for individuals with disability and would be happy to do the same for you. You can reach me at 205-313-7487 or by email at [Amyr@lakeshore.org](mailto:Amyr@lakeshore.org)

Sincerely,

**Amy Rauworth**  
*Director of Policy and Public Affairs*  
*Lakeshore Foundation*

“THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE  
RIGHT WORD AND THE ALMOST  
RIGHT WORD IS THE DIFFERENCE  
BETWEEN LIGHTNING AND THE  
LIGHTNING BUG.”  
- MARK TWAIN



# CREATING EQUALITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

This year the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) celebrates its 25 anniversary! We have certainly come a long way since people with disability crawled up the steps of the capital so that their voices could be heard and change could be made. As we celebrate this truly momentous occasion, it is important that we continue to move forward and set the tone for how others view individuals with disability.

Here are a few points to remember as you report on related events:

- *Access is a right, not a privilege. Companies, restaurants and organizations that provide access are simply obeying the law. Those who do not are breaking it.*
- *Individuals with a disability are not people to be pitied. Disability should not be characterized as a negative thing.*
- *Society tends to create and place barriers to access, whether they are physical, programmatic or attitudinal; disability itself does not create inaccessible environments. This has a greater impact on causing the individual to feel “disabled” or left out.*
- *Changing the perception of people with disability is largely in the hands of the media.*

## BARRIERS STILL ABOUND - YOU CAN HELP

Lack of access still occurs on multiple societal levels and, while you may not be aware of it, some may be present in your workplace. Here are some ways media outlets may unknowingly be creating barriers.

1. **PHYSICAL:** *The environment we are in. It can be natural or architectural, but both can present significant barriers.*

### **Examples:**

*Inaccessible staging areas. For example, an elevated set with no ramp.*

*Limited Interior signage.*

*Limited number of alert and broadcast formats and technologies, such as no captioning*

*Inaccessible building features like doors that are too heavy, no ramps or no accessible bathrooms*

2. **PROGRAMMATIC:** *This deals with resource allotment, investment and availability, and is evident in policies, procedures and protocols. It often also includes a lack of training and professional competencies.*

### **Examples:**

*Inappropriate verbiage used when referring to an individual with disability.*

*Lack of disability etiquette.*

*Providing choice and equal opportunity during an interview. For example, allowing an individual who uses a wheelchair the same access as anyone else, as well as giving them the option to transfer out of their wheelchair into a standard chair.*



3. *ATTITUDINAL: The personal beliefs, opinions, knowledge and prejudices of individuals with a disability, their families and friends, program and event staff, and community leaders, workers, peers and those telling the story.*

*Examples:*

*Reporting an individual as “wheelchair-bound” or “confined to a wheelchair” is a poor misconception and denotes an unfitting perception of his or her abilities.*

*Not giving attention or air time to disability and disability-related issues.*

*Only highlighting disability as an inspiration and/or hero story*

*Not hiring or including individuals with a disability perspective as part of the editorial team.*

For more information, you can check out the National Disability Rights Network’s article, “Reporting and Writing About Disabilities.”  
<http://www.ndrn.org/en/media/press-kit/265-reporting-and-writing-about-disabilities.html>

# DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

## WHEN WRITING OR SPEAKING ABOUT OR WITH A PERSON WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY:

- *Always use person-first language. While it might not be the most concise way to describe an individual, it is the most respectful.*
- *When referring to someone without disability, it is appropriate to use the term non-disabled. Avoid the term able-bodied.*
- *There are a wide range of physical disabilities and associated causes and levels of function. Consider each unique situation and remember that people with disability are as diverse as people without disability.*
- *Do not assume that a person with disability is unhappy or has the desire to be “cured.”*
- *Individuals who are paralyzed have varying levels of paralysis. Do not assume a person is paralyzed from the waist down unless you are certain of his or her diagnosis.*
- *Try not to give undue praise for everyday situations and accomplishments simply because an individual has a disability. Limit these types of praises and compliments to individuals with disability who truly accomplish inspirational or heroic achievements.*
- *A disability is not a negative characteristic and should not be portrayed as such.*
- *An individual who uses a wheelchair may have any varying degree of mobility, but is never “bound” or “confined” to his or her wheelchair.*

## WHEN INTERVIEWING A PERSON WITH A PHYSICAL DISABILITY:

- *Never use a person’s disability to improve another individual’s perspective on life.*
- *Make sure the interview site is accessible.*

- *Ask ahead of time if the person will need any accommodations.*
- *Speak to the person in the same way you would to a person without disability. There is no need to crouch or kneel to the level of the individual if the interview will be brief.*
- *For an on-camera interview, ask how the person would like to be interviewed. A person who can ambulate may want to stand or sit, while a person who uses a wheelchair may want to sit in his or her wheelchair or transfer to another chair.*

## WHEN INTERVIEWING A PERSON WITH A SENSORY DISABILITY:

- *Always verbally introduce and excuse yourself when you join or leave a conversation with an individual who is visually impaired.*
- *If an individual has difficulty speaking, do not assume he or she has an intellectual disability or alter your own speech or attitude.*
- *Allow sufficient time for communication and do not attempt to finish his or her sentences or provide words before he or she can say them.*
- *If a person has hearing loss, consider writing your message or having an interpreter, as the majority of this population does not read lips.*

## WHEN INTERVIEWING A PERSON WITH AN INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY:

- *Keep the interview space small and preferably well-known to the individual. For example, an interview done at a public park may be overwhelming.*
- *The individual may easily lose focus or get off task. It may be beneficial to keep a visible schedule or list of questions for him or her to see.*
- *It may help to allow him or her access to a preferred location or object during the interview.*
- *Ask one question at a time.*

## WHEN INTERVIEWING AN ATHLETE WITH A DISABILITY:

- *Treat the athlete the same as an athlete without disability.*
- *Focus on the athlete's sport, not his or her disability.*
- *Have a basic understanding of the sport and any equipment used for the sport. If you don't know, just ask.*
- *Understand the different levels and types of disability sport competition. For example:*
  - *There are local > regional > national/ collegiate > international competitions*
  - *The Olympic Games are the largest sporting event in the world and are held every two years for elite athletes without disability.*
  - *The Paralympic Games are the third-largest sporting event in the world and are held every two years for elite athletes with disability. The same host city and venues are used as the Olympic Games, and the Games takes place two weeks after the closing ceremonies of the Olympic Games.*
  - *The Special Olympics are local, regional, national and international sport trainings and competitions for individuals with intellectual disability.*

\*For a more in-depth list of terms and information, check out the National Disability Rights Network article, "Reporting and Writing About Disabilities." <http://www.ndrn.org/en/media/press-kit/265-reporting-and-writing-about-disabilities.html>