

18 Ways to be Inclusive in Synagogue

1. When you are talking about someone who has a disability or an illness, don't say that someone 'suffers from' or is a 'victim.' If someone has a heart attack or a stroke, they either survive it or they don't. They don't 'suffer' it. We live with conditions; we are not 'victims' of them.
2. In the social hall, be aware of the needs of congregants who may appreciate your assistance. Some people need help to get into the room, get a seat or serve their food.
3. The wheelchair accessible toilet is there for people who have disabilities or are helping someone else to use it. People who really need it don't have the option of using another – but you do!
4. 'Assistive Devices' are walkers, canes, crutches, wheelchairs or scooters. Touching them is like touching the owner. Don't move them, don't lean on them, and don't put anything on them. If it is really in the way, tell the owner and ask where it can be put.
5. If you are talking to someone, maintain eye contact, speak slowly and clearly, and don't cover your mouth with your hands, prayer book etc. If the person you are talking to is hard of hearing or deaf, they can't understand you if they can't see your mouth moving. Don't yell or talk extra loudly; it won't help!
6. Attitude is everything. Please don't say or do anything to give the impression that you think people who have disabilities are not as happy or healthy as anyone else.
7. When you get up from a chair at one of the tables, please push the chair as far in as you can. For people who do not see well, or those with poor balance, a chair sitting unexpectedly away from the table is a real hazard.
8. If someone appears sad or upset, don't be afraid to ask if they are alright, and don't ignore the answer if it makes you uncomfortable. If it's something you can't deal with, tell the Rabbi.
9. Don't ignore the "Scent Free" rule. Some congregants are extremely sensitive to fragrances – even the really expensive perfumes can cause severe reactions.



10. Don't assume you know what help someone needs or doesn't need. Ask!
11. Don't assume there is anything that a person who has a disability can't or won't want to do. People with all kinds of disabilities play golf, tennis, bowl, or go dancing – regardless of the type of disability!
12. Don't ever say 'wheelchair bound' or 'confined to a wheelchair'. Both are inaccurate and offensive to people who use wheelchairs. They represent freedom to people who need them!
13. Don't ever push someone's wheelchair without asking, even if they are going the same place you are. It's like grabbing someone's arm and dragging them along.
14. Don't ever yell at people who have a disability, unless it's to warn them of an emergency.
15. If you are speaking with someone who is very short or seated in a wheelchair or on a walker, please sit down or bend over so they don't have to lean back to look at you. Don't kneel – it's demeaning.
16. Don't be afraid to use normal language around people who have disabilities. It's OK to ask someone who is blind if they have read a book. You can ask someone who is deaf if they have heard the news, or ask someone who uses a wheelchair if they are going for a walk. Even people who are mentally ill say that something (or someone) drives them nuts!
17. Don't talk to adults who have intellectual disabilities as if they are children. They are adults.
18. If someone has a facial difference (noticeable misalignment or missing features) do not assume there is any other problem. Do not call a facial difference a disability. People who live with a facial difference generally are not disabled – they just look different.

