



**People with Mobility
Impairments: What You Need to
Know**
Library Accessibility Tip Sheet 4

Overview

Individuals with mobility impairments or disorders may be limited in their ability to move; have reduced use (or no use) of certain muscle groups; or have a combination of the traits mentioned. The person may have had the disability since birth, or he or she may have acquired it as a result of an accident, illness, or the aging process. A mobility impairment or disorder may necessitate the use of adaptive equipment and technologies, such as a cane, crutches, walker, wheelchair, scooter, large-grips pen, a grabber, joysticks, or one of many other assistive devices. Many patrons will have some of the adaptive equipment wherever they go; others will need to have it available to them.

(Adapted in part from “Those of Us Dislabeled: A Guide to Awareness and Understanding,” University of Kentucky Human Development Institute, Cooperative Extension Service, 2000.)

Tips

To address the needs of people with mobility impairments, be aware that each person will have his or her unique needs and is the best person to tell staff members how they can best assist. It is important to keep these tips in mind:

- Staff should monitor workstations, tables, and self-checkout stations designated for people who use wheelchairs—as well as aisleways and other public areas—for obstructions and tripping hazards.
- Displays should not impede access. Handrails should be free from decorations.
- Provide an area where staff and patrons can sit to talk at eye level, with good lighting.
- Have tables that are accessible to people who use wheelchairs on each floor of the library and in both the adult and children’s sections.
- Signage should be large and bright and have high contrast. It should be mounted at a level that can be seen by children and adults in wheelchairs.
- Put large-print books in an area where there is ready access to seating.
- Ensure that all staff members know the library’s evacuation plans and procedures for helping people with mobility disabilities during emergencies. Staff should know where any special emergency equipment is stored as well as how to safely use the equipment.
- Staff should be aware that items such as magnifying glasses, tote bags, baskets, book props, page turners, signature guides, pens with large grips, and grabbers are available, and where they are located.

- Ensure that staff members are available when needed and requested by the patron to retrieve books and other resources or to perform tasks such as photocopying, lifting heavy books, and carrying the items to the study area. If the library's rules permit, and the patron requests help to the bus or to his or her car, staff could assist with carrying items.
- All staff should know what assistive technology (AT) is available at the library, how it is designed to help individuals, how to use assistive technology AT, and how to instruct patrons in its use. If there is a designated AT specialist and trainer within the library system, all staff should know who the person is and how to contact him or her.
- Ensure that adaptive equipment and AT services are identified in a noticeable but unobtrusive way. For example, instead of identifying an AT workstation with a large sign, use a running screen saver with a simple message (e.g., "This computer is equipped with adaptive technology; you may be asked to move if a patron requires these services").
- Staff should ask, "What's the best way I can help you?" when a patron requests assistance. Let the person guide you.
- After offering assistance, wait for acceptance; don't be afraid to ask questions if you aren't sure about something.
- Respect the patron's privacy. Do not ask questions about his or her disability or its cause.
- Understand that the adaptive equipment of a person with a disability is an extension of his or her body—this is true for adults and children. Ask for the person's permission before touching or moving the equipment.
- Use a normal tone of voice when extending a verbal welcome. Do not raise your voice unless requested.
- Act naturally. It's all right to use phrases like "We are going to walk straight ahead for three feet then turn right" or "Those are really cute shoes you have on." People with mobility impairments say these things, too.
- When talking to a person in a wheelchair for more than a minute, move to a location where you can sit and be on eye level with the patron.
- Always speak directly to a person with a disability—not the person's companion, aide, or sign-language interpreter.
- Offer a seat to people with crutches, canes, or walkers when they are waiting.

Assistive Technology

Assistive devices and technologies are important to have within the library for patrons' use. If funding permits, it is also important to develop a circulating collection of some items, which allows people on a limited budget to try items before they buy them. Items useful to have in the library include those that help people with disabilities have the same access as those without disabilities. These items include the following:

- Alternative pointing devices: trackballs, touch pads, touch screens, handheld pointing devices, or joysticks
- One or more of the following: key guards; alternative, wireless, large-print, or ergonomic keyboards; voice input

- An adjustable-height workstation, with chairs that provide good support and have armrests, and an adjustable keyboard tray
- Non-tilting chairs for people with walkers and other assistive mobility aides
- Table area large enough to lay down crutches and canes
- Grabbers to allow patrons with limited range to reach items that are high as well as low
- Tote bags or baskets designed for use with walkers
- Page turners
- Baskets on wheels
- Swivel-seat cushions
- Adjustable tables or risers to change table heights
- Different styles of pens (i.e., soft/hard composition materials, barrel widths, length of pen)

Resources

ABLEDATA

www.abledata.com

A compendium of information on a wide range of assistive technologies and resources to enable persons with disabilities to interact within their communities and to improve their quality of life. ABLEDATA does not sell devices but rather directs visitors to companies that do sell the items.

ADA Home Page

www.ada.gov

Maintained by the Department of Justice provides visitors with information and Technical Assistance concerning the Americans with Disabilities Act including providing direct technical assistance to organizations.

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

<http://askjan.org/>

JAN provides employers and employees with reasonable solutions to accommodations for persons with disabilities. The website provides information on a wide range of disabilities and the ADA.

World Wide Web Consortium's Website Accessibility Initiative (W3C)

www.w3.org/WAI

The organization provides guidelines for electronic information presentation to assure individuals using assistive devices can independently access web pages and databanks.