House Tips for Interacting with People with Disabilities (Materials adapted from Wheelock Theater Guidelines and the Massachusetts Statehouse Tips for Interaction)

1. When talking with a person with a disability, speak directly to that person rather than to a companion or sign language interpreter who may be present, See the person not the disability!

2. When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands. People with limited hand use or who wear an artificial limb can usually shake hands. Shaking hands with the left hand is an acceptable greeting.

3. When meeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others who may be with you. When conversing in a group, identify the person to whom you are speaking.

4. lf you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions. Do not be offended if your offer is not accepted.

5. Treat adults as adults. Do not use first names unless everyone present is addressed that way. Never patronize people who use wheelchairs by patting them on the head or shoulder. Don't use first names unless everyone present is addressed that way.

6. Leaning or hanging on a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person and is generally considered annoying. The chair is a part of the personal body space of the person who uses it.

7. Listen attentively when talking to a person who has difficulty speaking. Be patient and wait for the person to finish, rather than correcting or speaking for the person. lf necessary, ask short questions that require short answers, a nod or a shake of the head. Never pretend to understand if you are having difficulty doing so. Instead, repeat what you have understood and allow the person to respond.

B. When speaking with a person in a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches, place yourself at eye level in front of the person to facilitate the conversation.

9. To get the attention of a person who is hearing-impaired, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly in a normal tone of voice. Keep hands, food, etc. away from your mouth when speaking.

10. Don't be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted, common expressions, such as "See you later" or Did you hear about this," that seem to relate to the person's disability.

General Usher Guidelines

Your ability to effectively interact with people with disabilities will ensure that all people who come to our shows will have the same access to the theater and the experience. Thank you in advance for your participation and cooperation.

Have a "welcoming" smile. You are the first contact people have at the theatre. Know where the wheelchair accessible bathroom is located. Know where all bathrooms are located. During the Autism Friendly Performance, make certain that the Family bathrooms are unlocked and their locations are known.

Ask before you give assistance. Offer information BEFORE the patron inquires,

Check supply of programs, large Format and braile programs (if applicable).

Check with House Manager. Are patrons who use wheelchairs expected? How many and where are they seated? Set up companion seats if needed.

Unless a power wheelchair breaks down, there is no need to offer to push a person who is using one.

Speak directly to the person who is disabled or using an interpreter. lf a companion is present, speak to both people equally.

Do not assume that someone with a speech impairment can not understand what you are saying. Speak in a regular tone of voice.

Some people with cognitive disabilities may not use eye contact or may be easily distracted. Do not interpret this as rude. Take the time to communicate effectively, perhaps moving to a quieter area or repeating the information in a different way.

Never take a person's crutches or cane away. Devices should be stored under their seat, not in the aisle.

lf a person is transferring from their wheelchair into a theater seat, be sure to check with the patron if they will need their wheelchair at intermission. Let the person know where the wheelchair will be kept. Check in with the patron at intermission. Be sure to bring the wheelchair back to the patron at the end of the performance.

Be flexible and responsive. You will always encounter new scenarios. If you can accommodate someone easily, you should.

You are not required to provide personal care and you are not required to suspend or disregard security or safety procedures or considerations.

Have paper and pencil available. Relax! Be Yourself.

Front of House Tips for Patrons who are Blind or with Low Vision

NOTE: Many people who are considered blind have some sight rather than no sight at all. Many people who are blind are quite mobile and independent. Many persons who are blind use Braille, the majority of blind persons do not.

Check with the House Managers:

How many patrons have self-identified? Are we expecting service dogs? Where are patrons seated? Please note route to accessible restrooms.

Familiarize yourselves with the Audio Description receivers. Locate Braille (if applicable) and Large Format playbills.

Know who are the describers? When does pre-show description begin? Groups may be arriving early and all assistance may occur earlier than on the schedule. Please note the time you are expected on the days you are assisting !

Service animals: Are not pets and should not be touched without permission of the owner. A person is not required to carry proof of a disability that requires a service animal. All service animals must be leashed. If the animal presents an active threat you may ask the owner to remove it from the property. Walk on the side of the person away from the dog. Inquiring children should be told the dog is a working dog. Patron can decide after that if more info will be offered. Guide dogs may accompany their owner and sit under the chair or in front of their feet. Nearby patrons if concerned can be told guide dogs will not bark unless they sense their owner is in danger. lf nearby patrons have issue with dogs, report to one of the house managers immediately to determine if a seat exchange is possible.

Volunteers should:

Always identify and introduce yourself, stating clearly who you are! Ask the patron if

they would like assistance.

Face the person when talking. lf your eyes are directed toward the person, your voice

will be as well. It is appropriate to touch the person's arm lightly when you speak so that

he or she knows to whom you are speaking before you begin.

At the ticketing window, identify the denomination of bills when giving change back to

the blind person.

Ask the patron if they would like assistance with moving through the crowd, and if they

would like to take your arm. Let the blind person TAKE your arm and follow you. This will

help you to guide rather than propel or lead this person. It is important to let the person

control his own movements. Don't grab, push or pull. Do not attempt to lead the

individual without first asking.

Communicate in a normal level of voice. Talk directly to the blind person, not through a

sighted companion. Always tell and individual when you are leaving.

When guiding, describe the surroundings including stairs and ramps (it is six steps up

from the lobby to the entrance of the theatre, we'll be turning left and moving down a

ramp, you have the 3'd seat on the right). Be as specific as possible. Use clock cues ("the

door is at 10 o'clock"). Before using this strategy, ask the person if this is useful to them.

When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat. Ask the

patron if they would like a Braille (if available) or LF playbill, and let them know who is describing and

when the pre-show starts.

Volunteers with AD receivers should introduce themselves and offer the patron the

receiver and headset. Describe the receiver box and where to turn on the receiver and

how to adjust. These volunteers need to check back with the patron just before the show

starts to make sure everything is working correctly and replace equipment if it isn't.

Narration Equipment: House volunteers need to keep track of how many pieces are out in the house. House volunteers should check back with patrons at intermission find out if there are any other

needs - directions to restrooms or refreshments. At end of show all pieces need to be

inventories and counted. Ear pieces should be cleaned. Batteries should be removed.

Front door volunteers will offer assistance upon departure. Open the doors for all patrons. Thank all

patrons.

People with Hearing Disabilities

Communication varies widely; therefore the preferred method will vary. Ask the person how they prefer to communicate.

Take the time to communicate effectively. Use simple language. Establish eye contact.

Always be prepared with a pen and paper in the event that someone wants to communicate with you in writing.

If the individual is using an interpreter, speak directly to the person and not to the interpreter.

To get the attention of a person who is hearing-impaired, tap the person on the

shoulder or wave your hand. Look directly at the person and speak clearly in a

normal tone of voice. If the person indicates that they speech read, make sure that you face them and Keep hands, food, etc. away from your mouth when speaking. Do not assume that they can read your lips.

Make sure that communication is understood on both sides, repeating your understanding of the discussion for verification. Never pretend that you understood when you do not.

Be patient. You may need to repeat yourself or move to a quieter space to be understood

Be flexible. Use gestures, facial expressions, etc. when attempting to communicate.

Familiarize yourself with the variety and types of assisted listening devices which we offer and where to find them.

Proper Language is important for all cast and crew

The way that we express ourselves tells a great deal about our attitudes and beliefs. As people who interact with the public in furtherance of our mission statement, it is our responsibility to make sure everyone feels welcome and valued. Therefore it is important to know the dos and don’t of language when interacting with a person with a disability. Use first person language and put the person ahead of the disability.

DO SAY DON’T SAY

A person with a disability A cripple, handicapped person

She uses a wheelchair She is confined to a wheel chair or wheelchair bound

He has a cognitive disability He is mentally retarded

She has a learning disability She is learning disabled

He has autism He is autistic

She has a brain injury She is brain damaged

A person who is blind Blind person

However, the most important aspect is respect so ask about personal preferences, for example, some individuals prefer to be identified as Deaf or Autistic first. Putting the person first means being sensitive and respectful.

MODIFICATIONS TO OUR PROCEEDURES DURING THE SENSORY/AUTISM FRIENDLY PERFORMANCE (AFP)

With the assistance of a generous grant from the Astra Foundation of Acton, MA, we are excited to follow in the footsteps of TDF Autism-Friendly Broadway performances of The Lion King and Mary Poppins as we offer a unique live theater performance of the musical Seussical which has been specially adapted to serve the needs of audience members on the autism spectrum.

Our February 11, 2016 matinee performance at 12:00 PM will not be designated sensory friendly. Tickets for that performance will be available to individuals with autism spectrum disorders and their supervising family members, caregivers or friends.

Tickets ($10 each) are all reserved seating. Purchase options:

contact a cast member,  buy online at [MKTIX.COM](http://mktix.com/), or call us at [978-264-8150](tel:978-264-8150)

The performance is about 2 hours plus a 15 minute intermission. We understand that this is a long time, and we expect that there will be some audience movement between the auditorium and the lobby and the "chill-out" space. We also understand that some audience members might have to leave before the end of the show.

We will have a link on our website to download a PDF or Microsoft WORD document containing a Social Story to allow audience members and their families, teachers, therapists or caregivers to prepare for this event.

At the performance, we strongly encourage parents and caregivers to be aware of any early warning signs of difficult behavior or tantrums.

The adjustments that we are making to the production include:

* House lights to remain partially lit during the whole performance
* The house sound will be somewhat diminished.
* Assistive communication devices, and headphones are allowed
* Judgment free experience - because all of the audience members at the performance will be aware of the make up of the audience population, there will not be an issue of behavior expectations
* Cast and crew members will have received professional training to ensure that they are aware of audience needs.We are holding training sessions to educate our cast and crew, and we will have specialists assisting the ushers and house staff.
* A brief pre-show introduction of the actors in costume (but out of character) to reinforce the fact that the production is pretend
* An expectation that audience members are likely to vocalize and move around during the production
* A separate staffed "chill-out" space outside the auditorium to allow people to leave the performance if needed (we expect to have a video monitor in this space that will show the on-going performance on the stage)
* Free Fidgets/Manipulatives will be distributed prior to the performance for the audience members to hold and fidget.
* Free peanut and wheat free snacks and drinks will be provided prior to the show and during intermission and these items are allowed to be consumed in the auditorium during the performance.
* Family bathrooms will be open and available.