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People use wheelchairs for many different reasons. Wheelchairs enable freedom of mobility to many people. If you are interacting with a wheelchair user for the first time, it can be difficult to know how to act. You don't want to accidentally offend someone, but at the same time, you want to be helpful and understanding. The most important thing to remember is people who use wheelchairs are [no different from you](#).

Here are a few tips to help make sure you are respectful to those using a wheelchair.

- Avoid making presumptions about their abilities. Being in a wheelchair does not mean the person is paralyzed or incapable of taking any steps. Some people only use wheelchairs because they can't stand for extended periods of time, or have a walking restriction problem. If you are curious, it is far better to ask than to assume. Ask in a manner that the person can decline, if they so choose. For example, "Do you mind my

asking why you use a wheelchair?” Only ask a wheelchair user why, once you’ve become familiar with them. This is not an appropriate question to ask a stranger.

- Speak directly to a person using a wheelchair. If a person is in a wheelchair and is accompanied by someone else, involve that person in the conversation, but do not ignore the person in the wheelchair. Do not assume that the person in the wheelchair can’t speak for themselves. If you are in a long conversation, sit down. It is easier for everyone if you can look at each other in the eyes.
- Ask permission before touching the user or their wheelchair. Patting or leaning on the chair may be interpreted as disrespectful. The person may be using a wheelchair because of an injury, so your touch may be painful. Treat the wheelchair as an extension of a person’s body. If you wouldn’t normally touch someone’s shoulder, then don’t put your hand on their wheelchair. Always respect another person’s [personal space](#).

[CSCS](#) wants to help bridge the gap between those with and without disabilities. We provide quality disability advocacy to our community. Reach out to us today if we can provide [services](#) for you or someone you know.