

GUIDELINES FOR MEETING SPECIAL NEEDS

Adapted from: California Opportunity for Reference Excellence Mini-Workshop.
California State Library, 1989.

DISABLED/AGED

- ◆Address the handicapped/aged person, not the person's companion
- ◆Keep aisles clear of obstacles
- ◆Have some chairs that are higher and easier to use for some people than low chairs

HARD OF HEARING

- ◆Face the person directly, making sure he/she can see your face
- ◆Do not talk as you walk away or put your hands in front of your mouth
- ◆Speak slowly and clearly; do not exaggerate lip movements
- ◆When you are not understood, use different words; because of pitch, some words are better understood than others
- ◆Try to maintain eye contact, which supports the feeling of direct communication
- ◆Write down the question or ask the patron to write down information

BLIND OR PARTIALLY SIGHTED

- ◆Have a good magnifying glass available
- ◆When guiding a blind person, let him/her take your arm, not the other way around
- ◆Good lighting and large, clear signage are essential
- ◆Do not feel self-conscious about using phrases such as, "I see what you mean."

OLDER ADULTS

- ♦ Do not assume all older patrons have physical impairments such as poor vision or hearing
- ♦ Many older patrons are not comfortable with technological advances such as online catalogs, microfiche tools and the Internet; provide whatever assistance is needed
- ♦ Some older adults are lonely and seek companionship or someone to talk to; a gentle reminder that others are waiting or that you have other responsibilities may be necessary

NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING PATRONS

- ♦ Speak clearly
- ♦ If what you say is not understood, use different words and phrases
- ♦ Show concern and be courteous
- ♦ Make “survival” sheets for the languages you often encounter (e.g., Spanish: *No hablo español--I don't speak English; Por favor sigame--please follow me.*) Include phonetic pronunciations
- ♦ If accent is the problem, ask the patron to write down what he/she needs. Warning: be sensitive to those unable to write
- ♦ If others on the staff know a foreign language, call on them for assistance

PATRONS FROM DIFFERENT CULTURES

- ♦ Speak in brief, simple sentences rather than long compound or complex ones
- ♦ Do not ask negative or leading questions (e.g., “Don’t you want...?”)
- ♦ Do not ask “either/or” questions; pose one question at a time
- ♦ Do not expect verbal responses such as, “I see;” watch for nonverbal reinforcement (nods)
- ♦ If you are uncertain whether you are being understood, ask for a response
- ♦ Recognize that people from some cultures are not demonstrative and that their smile may reflect confusion or frustration rather than understanding or agreement

- ♦Silence should not be construed as rudeness or lack of understanding; some possible reasons are: respect for authority, full agreement with what you are saying, or fear of being judged by the English used
- ♦Saving face is important in many cultures; show respect at all times
- ♦Be patient and give the patron time to mentally translate what you have said
- ♦Be aware that in some cultures, making eye contact is considered impolite
- ♦Use a well-modulated tone of voice; speaking too loudly or too rapidly can be misinterpreted

CHILDREN

- ♦Try to physically place yourself at the child's level (sit or squat down when possible)
- ♦Show them the same level of respect and courtesy shown to adults
- ♦Give them the same level of service given to adults
- ♦Do not assume all questions are school-related
- ♦Treat school questions as important
- ♦Find out the real question being asked; children may have even more trouble explaining their needs than adults do
- ♦Be sensitive to matching the information you provide with the reading level of the child, not just his/her grade level
- ♦School libraries emphasize teaching children how to use library tools; give that approach less emphasis and make using the library a fun experience
- ♦Always find out how much information is needed
- ♦Some children, like adults, are difficult to deal with; give all children the same level of assistance