



# Wheelchair Etiquette

Wheelchairs help people adapt to mobility impairments. Don't assume that using a wheelchair is a tragedy. It may mean freedom, allowing the person to move independently. Focus on the person, not the disability.

## Do

- Ask the wheelchair user if he or she would like some assistance before you offer help.
- If possible, sit or crouch down so you are at eye level when talking, especially if you plan to visit for longer than a few minutes.
- Speak directly to the person in the wheelchair, not to a person nearby or pushing the chair.
- Recognize people in wheelchairs have varying capacities. Some can walk short distances and use wheelchairs to conserve energy while others rely entirely on the wheelchair.
- Terms like "I'll be running along" or "let's go for a walk" are perfectly appropriate. Wheelchair users express the idea of moving in the same way as others.
- Do encourage children to ask questions about the wheelchair and learn about it.

## Don't

- Lean or hang on to the wheelchair.
- Move the wheelchair when the wheelchair user is "transferring" to a chair or a bed. (Call a nurse or attendant if the person needs help rather than attempt to assist with the transfer.)
- Forget to give clear directions for navigation including: physical obstacles, weather conditions or distance that may hinder the wheelchair user's travel.

## Safety Tips for Clients

- Lock the brakes on the wheelchair when you start a therapy dog visit.
- Some wheelchair users may need a wheelchair seat belt during a visit. Leaning over to pat a therapy dog may pose a danger for some people in wheelchairs.

## Safety Tips for Therapy Dogs

- Take a cautious approach around wheels, especially if your therapy dog isn't used to navigating around wheelchairs. Tails and paws can easily get trapped.
- Watch around corners and entryways in corridors. Some wheelchair users can drive too fast, especially in power chairs.

## For more information on stroke, check these useful web sites:

1. Non-Wheelchair User Etiquette, [www.aparelyzed.com/etiquette.html](http://www.aparelyzed.com/etiquette.html)
2. Wheelchair Etiquette-Disability Awareness,

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OTD Toolbox Infosheet #2:



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## Good dogs doing great work!

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