**Disability Network Southwest Michigan presents:**

**Disability Etiquette 101**

* **Presume** competence! Just like we automatically assume people without disabilities can do things until they tell us otherwise, we owe people with disabilities that same courtesy.
* **Talk to the person**, not to their friends, parents, partners, or assistants. People speak for themselves and might use an interpreter or communication aid to do so.
* Everyone wants to be understood! **Ask the person to repeat something** if you need to hear it again.
* **It’s okay to use phrases that everyone uses**. “See you later,” and “Let’s take a walk,” are perfectly acceptable to people with visual and mobility disabilities.
* **Get to know someone as a whole person**. People have a variety of interests and answering everyone’s questions about one’s disability gets old. Plus, it’s private information. You probably wouldn’t want to talk about your cholesterol to a stranger at the grocery store, would you?
* **Don’t assume** that someone needs assistance. People with and without disabilities learn how to get around and manage their daily life. At the same time, don’t be afraid to ask if someone needs a hand…you would do that for anyone, right?
  + When you ask if someone needs assistance, *listen* to the answer. Sometimes a “helpful” hand and a robbery are hard to distinguish!
  + Make sure to ask *how* you can help. The response might be different from what you guessed.