



## Basic Etiquette: People with Mental Illness

1. The terms mental illness and psychiatric disability are essentially interchangeable. Some groups and individuals prefer one term to the other, but in general both terms are considered acceptable. A possible alternative is to describe a person as someone who has mental health issues.
2. Do not assume that people with psychiatric disabilities are more likely to be violent than people without psychiatric disabilities; this is a myth.
  - The wide range of behaviors associated with mental illness vary from passivity to disruptiveness.
  - When the illness is active, the individual may or may not be at risk of harming him or herself, or others.
3. People with mental illness do not have mental retardation; however, some people who have mental retardation also have mental illness. Do not assume that people with psychiatric disabilities also have cognitive disabilities or are less intelligent than the general population. In fact, many people with mental illness have above-average intelligence.
4. Do not assume that people with psychiatric disabilities necessarily need any extra assistance or different treatment.
5. Treat people with psychiatric disabilities as individuals. Do not make assumptions based on experiences you have had with other people with psychiatric disabilities.
6. Do not assume that all people with psychiatric disabilities take or should take medication.
7. Do not assume that people with psychiatric disabilities are not capable of working in a wide variety of jobs that require a wide range of skills and abilities.
8. Do not assume that people with psychiatric disabilities do not know what is best for them, or have poor judgment.
9. If someone with a psychiatric disability gets upset, ask calmly if there is anything you can do to help and then respect their wishes.
10. Do not assume that a person with a psychiatric disability is unable to cope with stress.