Hi guys, my name is Ashley West. I'm a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with Iowa Department for the Blind. And on behalf of the State Disability Access Committee I'm going to be giving a presentation on disability etiquette.

So, why? Well the US Census Bureau reports that close to 57 million Americans have a disability. The hope is that this training will provide staff with the tools, education, to better be able to serve those job candidates with those disabilities more effectively. So what exactly is a disability? The ADA defines an individual with a disability as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, or a person who has a history or record of such impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment.

So as you're working with job candidates, some common examples of disabilities that you may find are individuals with vision loss or blindness, individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing, individuals with mental health conditions, individuals with intellectual disability, brain injury, autism spectrum disorder, physical disability. As we look at those various categories they can kind of be divided between visible versus hidden disabilities. Visible disabilities are those disabilities that are immediately apparent. So when a job candidate walks in and they're using a wheelchair or a white cane, they're using American Sign Language, it's pretty distinctive that that individual has some type of disability. Hidden disabilities, sometimes referred to as invisible disabilities, are disabilities that are not immediately apparent. So, common examples, mental health conditions. So major depression, bipolar disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, other conditions such as traumatic brain injury, epilepsy, diabetes, chronic fatigue syndrome, cystic fibrosis. Again this is not an exhaustive list, but some of those examples that you might come across.

So first thing we want to touch on is making sure you're choosing your words appropriately. So always avoid outdated terms like handicapped, crippled, physically challenged. Those are not acceptable in any situation. The correct term would be disability. And avoid using words that disempower individuals, like victim or sufferer. And always put the, use person first language. So, for example, a person with a disability. Or a student with autism. Rather than autistic student. But again always keeping in mind that that individual is the expert. So although these are the general rules, that individual may prefer something different. So defer back to that person.

So overall across all disabilities always keep in mind that the individual is the expert. When you're talking to a person with a disability speak directly to that person. Do not speak to their interpreter or if they have a support staff. The person you're working with is the individual with the disability so make sure that same person you're speaking to directly, engaging in conversation, things like that. When you do offer assistance to someone with a disability make sure you offer assistance. Never just force assistance. And then wait until the offer is accepted. And then listen or ask for instructions. And if you're ever unsure or have questions again that individual is the expert so make sure to ask that individual.

So talking about the various disabilities, when you're working with individuals with blindness or vision loss remember that again the individual is the expert. So blindness versus vision loss is again terminology. So deferring back to what that individual prefers. Technically speaking, legal blindness is considered 20 over 200. So a person can see at 20 feet what a person with 20 20 vision can see at 200 feet. But again that person's going to be the expert on what they need as far as accommodations, comfortability level, navigating around the facility, things like that. So, these are just some general kind of cues, terms to go by when you're, when you're working with someone who is blind or has vision loss. So when you first meet with someone always identify, introduce yourself. Speak in a normal tone of voice. When you go to shake someone's hand, you know, extend your hand and let that person know that you have your hand out, ready to shake their hand. Always ask, again, always ask that individual if they need assistance. Don't just assume. If that individual says yes they would like assistance ask if they would like verbal directions or use sighted guide. When you are giving verbal directions make sure those verbal directions are descriptive specific. So for example, the door is a few steps ahead on the right. Rather than the door is right here. Or the door is up ahead there. Very vague, not helpful terms to someone who has vision loss or is blind. When you are providing sighted guide assistance, offer the person your arm above the elbow. And then at the end of the conversation when you're finished working with someone let them know that you're walking away. Another thing is when you're holding the door open for someone who is blind or has vision loss indicate that you're doing so. Doors are, can be landmarks for individuals so if they pass through a door and don't know it that can be very confusing as far as navigating a new environment. Always remember that guide dogs are working. So don't pee, don't feed, don't pet a guide dog. That'll keep you on your toes. And always remember with any assistive device a person's using is an extension of that person. So, with a white cane never grab a hold of that. Never direct someone with that white cane. That's an extension of them. And then if you are providing reader services for an individual, so you're, you know, reading that print information, you're maybe writing down someone's answers to something, always keep that confidential, confidentiality in place. So you know you're providing an important service. And the information they're providing you is very specific to them. So it should be kept confidential. Again when you're engaging with someone who is blind or has vision loss always always ask their preferred media preference. So that way when they do enroll in a class or a workshop you're able to provide that information, whether it be braille, audio, large print, electronic, they can have that information ahead of time. And therefore they're able to fully engage in that class or workshop. A great resource for this, if you have any questions or you need any information in that alternative format, is the Library with Iowa Department for the Blind. So, a little side note on that. But, contact them for, to get materials so people can access them. Very helpful.

So the next category of disability that I wanted to touch on was individuals who are Deaf or hard of hearing. When, sometimes there's confusion about, the safest way is to kind of, or general rule is that people who have hearing loss but still communicate through spoken word are referred to as individuals who are hard of hearing. While individuals who have profound hearing loss are referred to as individuals who are Deaf. Also note that the word Deaf needs to have a capital D. And this is because people who are Deaf often consider themselves to be part of a cultural group separate from their medical diagnosis or condition. So again, defer back to that individual. Ask them how they prefer to communicate, whether it be writing notes, lip reading, or they have a need for an interpreter. You know, various interpreters can be provided whether it's in person or a video interpreter. So make sure to explore those options and what that individual prefers. If you are speaking through an interpreter always remember that that interpreter is going to lag a few minutes behind, especially if you're using names or technical terms because they have to be finger spelled. So give a chance for that interpreter to catch up so all of the information you're communicating to that individual is accurate. Again talk directly to that person who is Deaf or hard of hearing. Do not speak to their interpreter. And then before you start speaking, make sure you have that individual's attention. So one thing to remember is that, American Sign Language is entirely different from the English language. So people who are Deaf or whose first language is ASL might not know how to lip read. So again, know what method of communication is best for that person per what that person says. Always, if you are lip reading with an individual or if that's the way that they prefer to communicate, make sure that you speak in a clear, expressive manner. Do not over enunciate or exaggerate words. Unless you were specifically requested to do so by the individual, do not raise your voice or speak loudly. Just speak in a normal tone. And then to facilitate lip reading always make sure that you know there's nothing blocking your mouth. You know, you're not turning away from the individual. Make sure obviously for lip reading an individual needs to be able to see your lips. So.

So the next category is individuals with psychiatric disabilities or mental health conditions. So, people with psychiatric disabilities may have some difficulty coping with tasks or interactions of daily life. They might have difficulty relating or thinking or feeling when it comes to interacting with other people. So always keep in mind that stress kind of exacerbates these conditions. So try to keep the situation, the pressure of the situation to a minimum. And then just like anybody else, everybody is an individual regardless of what category their disability fits in. So, you know, someone who has some type of psychiatric disability may appear very high energy, while another person may appear very sluggish. So just meeting that person where they're at, talking with them, seeing what makes them the most comfortable, is the best way to interact, facilitate communication, build rapport with those individuals who do have any type of psychiatric disabilities. So if a crisis situation does arise there is a more extensive training on kind of deescalation of crisis with individuals with mental health or psychiatric disabilities. But in general stay calm of course. Ask the person how you can best be of assistance. Find out if there's a support person that you can reach out to that can kind of assist you in that situation. If a person becomes upset or anxious, they may be confused or overwhelmed. So always speak in a normal, calm tone of voice, and repeat any information they need to reassure them.

So developmental disabilities. Always, always, remember that an individual with a developmental disability is an adult and unless you are told otherwise that individual can make their own decisions. So never speak down to them. Again just meeting that person where they're at. So gauge your pace, vocabulary, speech according to that individual so that you're able to effectively communicate the best way. Communicate in clear sentences. Use simple words. Concrete rather than abstracts, abstract concepts. Is kind of the best way to facilitate that communication. Another thing to note is if you're doing like a mock interview class or something like that or with an employer know that an individual may tell you answers that they think you want to hear or kind of routine answers, general type answers. So if you're wanting to know something, ask the question in a variety of ways. So for example, it doesn't sound like a job you would enjoy. Or, can you tell me one thing about this job that you think might be harder that you might not enjoy. That's going to really help that, facilitate those best job matches. Find out where those individuals, that individual's interests are. Things like that to facilitate that best job match. It can be difficult for people with developmental disabilities to make quick decisions so always be patient. Allow that person time. In terms of the facility, clear signage with pictograms can help a person who has a developmental disability to find their way around, navigate. And always remember that a person with developmental disability heavily relies on routines and familiar staff to manage their work and daily living. So any change or disruption in this may, it's going to have to have some adjustment period. So just be mindful of that.

Learning disabilities. So an individual with a learning disability has difficulty either receiving, expressing, or processing information. And always keep in mind that although an individual may have certain limitations, most people with learning disabilities have average or above average intelligence. So, it's again one of those hidden disabilities. So you may not know until you get really into working with someone that they do have a learning disability. So when you find that out, see what method of communication, what method of learning, works best for them. So for example, someone with dyslexia may have trouble with written information. So, you know, give them verbal, verbal cues, verbal explanations. And then always allow, you know, that extra time for reading different documents, reading assignments, things like that. On the other hand, auditory processing disorder, they, you know, when they're, spoken information may get scrambled. So they may need you to write things down for them. Again the individual, ask the individual what's the best way to relay that information. And always be direct in your communication. And keeping in mind the environment. So not only their best way of learning in terms of receiving that information, but also the best way the environment can help to facilitate receiving that information. So for example, it may be easier for a person to function in a quiet environment without distractions such as, you know, other people walking around, or a radio playing. Things like that.

Physical disabilities. So, when you're introduced to an individual of any disability it's always appropriate to shake hands. So regardless, we went through, you know, if the individual is blind, how you would go about doing that. Same with someone with a physical disability. Usually even with limited hand use or an artificial limb, they can shake hands in some sort. So shaking with the left hand is acceptable as well. So find out what works for that person and always make that effort to do so. Again, like I mentioned with the white cane, a wheelchair, or any assistance device is an extension of that person. So don't lean, hang, push even someone's wheelchair, unless you've asked, offered assistance, and they've said yes that's fine, this is how you go about doing it. And then, you know, go ahead and push that individual. So another thing to keep in mind as far as the facility is keeping ramps, doors, aisles clear. But again ask that person their preference. So you know if you need to move a bunch of things out of their way, or they would like you to push them to navigate around those obstacles. And something that's really important is when speaking to someone who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level in front of them to facilitate the conversation. Don't bend or crouch as you would when talking to a small child. So you know, pull up a chair. Facilitate that interaction, that communication. Again with the, the facility and working with someone with a physical disability be aware of reach limits. So you know putting things in a person, within a person's grasp. You know, keyboard, pencil, paper. Making sure that those things are in reach of individuals with physical disabilities. Again, never grab assistive devices. I can't kind of emphasize that enough. And then if you do offer a seat to a person who has limited mobility, keep in mind that chairs with arms or with higher seats are easier for some people to use. Let's see. If individuals do have limited use of their hands versus their arms, be prepared to offer assistance with reaching, grasping, or lifting objects. So, again keeping in mind that as with all accommodations, you know, when working with someone with a physical disability always be mindful of the surrounding environment. And often accommodations are made at little to no cost. So you know, adjusting the height of a seat, or moving things forward so a person can reach it, just keeping things in mind to facilitate, you know, more effective services for individuals.

I just wanted to leave you guys with a list of resources so that when you are working with individuals you can kind of go back to these. And if you have any questions, check these resources our. They're a great tool to have. So in general there's iowacompass.org. There's also The Job Accommodation Network, or JAN, and IowaAT. What I, what I like about the Job Accommodation Network is you can go on there and you can search for a specific disability and what accommodations, what things can you do to facilitate, you know, interaction of the environment, of materials, things like that, for individual with that specific disability. And then I have a list of disability specific information. So mental health, physical disabilities, Deaf, intellectual and developmental disabilities, Autism, brain injury, and then blindness. So please go and check those out if you have any questions. Especially when you are working with individuals. Thank you.