



Checklist for Restaurant Accessibility

Studies show that 1 in 5 American adults live with a disability. Like everyone else, people with disabilities want to live full lives – and for most, this includes dining at restaurants. However, many restaurant owners, managers, and staff do not know how to make people with disabilities feel welcome and at ease. This document contains various practical and easily implemented tips for making ALL guests feel welcome.

Basics

- Train all staff in proper disability etiquette and language. A few best practices include:
 - People with disabilities are people first. Treat them as you would treat any other person.
 - Always use person-first language. This puts the person before the disability (i.e. person who is blind). Do not use identity-first language. This puts the disability before the person (i.e. Blind woman).
 - Do not talk down to individuals literally or figuratively. If they use a wheelchair, use a chair to be on their same eye level if you are having a long conversation.
 - Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their companion.
 - A lack of immediate response does not indicate that the person can't or won't respond.
- Always give clear directions – instructions like “over there” are not helpful to people who can't see where you are pointing!
- Greet people as soon as they enter the establishment. In addition to making guests feel welcome, this helps guests to orient themselves within the space.
- It's OK to ask whether you can help, but accept “no” as an answer.
- Do not touch a guest's assistive devices (i.e. wheelchair, crutches, cane, medical equipment, technology) unless you have permission. Many of these devices are fragile and very expensive.
- Be prepared to accommodate service animals. Some things to note:
 - These animals are highly trained and will not act inappropriately. There is no reason to be afraid.

- Ask questions if you don't understand how or what task the service animal performs.
- Do not speak directly to or engage with the service animal.
- Do not touch a service animal without asking permission first.
- Do not offer a service animal food, toys, or distract them with any other object.
- Provide a table with extra space for the service animal, this might mean an extra seat space.
- Be prepared to communicate with customers in a way that suits them – simple language, written notes, etc.
- Ask for feedback to identify accessibility gaps.

Reservations

- Guests should be able to make reservations in more than one way – for example, by phone and online. Note: Online reservation service must be accessible.
- Allow guests to request accommodations.

Menus

- Be sure that online menus are accessible by screen reader and other assistive technology.
- Online menus should allow guests to change text size, spacing, and font.
- Keep online menus clearly structured and uncluttered.
- If online menus contain pictures, provide alternative text if needed.
- Use dark, easy to read text colors for both online and paper menus.
- Provide large print and Braille menus – and make sure to update these whenever you update your menu!
- Offer and clearly mark allergy-friendly options.

Physical Space

- At least one entrance to your restaurant needs to be accessible for mobility aids such as wheelchairs (ramps, unobstructed walkways, etc.).
- Provide accessible bathrooms – features include lowered toilets and sinks, enough space to maneuver with mobility aids, and handlebars in appropriate places.
- Keep your floorplan open, uncrowded, and avoid blocking pathways.
- Install lowered bar counters and tables with ample leg room.
- Provide good lighting to facilitate navigation.

- If possible, provide a low noise, calm environment to accommodate guests with sensory sensitivities.

Waitstaff

- Orient guests to the layout of the table (napkins, glasses, straws, etc.)
- Announce items as you place them on the table.
- If a drink already contains a straw when it is brought to the table, inform guests of this to avoid injury.
- Place all items within guests' easy reach.
- As a hiring manager, consider listing ASL as a desired skill for waitstaff.

Safety

- Have a plan for evacuating ALL guests and make this available in alternative format.
- Emergency signals should be both visible and audible.
- Run emergency drills.

These are just a few best practices on how you can provide a great dining experience for people with disabilities. If you are interested in learning more, please contact the Ablr team at info@Ablr360.com! Our mission is to remove barriers for people with disabilities and we know first-hand the challenges and barriers that people with disabilities face when visiting restaurants. We want to help you create an experience where everyone feels welcome and keeps coming back!