

GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING  
STUDENTS WITH

# PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENTS

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*Inspiring excellence, transforming lives  
through quality, impact, and care.*

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**UFS**  
CENTRE FOR UNIVERSAL  
ACCESS AND DISABILITY  
SUPPORT (CUADS)



## RULES OF ETIQUETTE WHEN TALKING TO A PERSON MAKING USE OF A WHEELCHAIR:



Although the UFS is actioning a plan to phase-in the retrofitting of inaccessible surfaces and buildings, people with physical disabilities often encounter a lot of obstacles when it comes to their physical environment as a result of a lack of accessible and wheelchair-friendly routes and entrances. This often leads to exclusion and isolation for most people living with physical disabilities. It is important to keep in mind that a person with a physical disability is a human being. They are not their disability or their wheelchair, for example.



- The first rule of etiquette when interacting with people in wheelchairs or power chairs is to remember that one should not focus on their disability. Instead, focus on the person.
- Respect a person's dignity, individuality and desire for independence.
- Always ask the person using the wheelchair if they would like assistance before you help them. It may not be needed or wanted.
- A person's wheelchair is part of their body space and should be treated with respect.

Remember that people who use wheelchairs have varying capabilities. Some people who use wheelchairs can walk with aid or for short distances. They use a wheelchair because it helps them to conserve energy and to move about with greater efficiency.

- Don't classify or think of people who use wheelchairs as "sick". Wheelchairs are used to help people adapt to or compensate for the mobility impairments that result from many non-contagious impairments.
- Don't pet guide dogs or other service animals as they are working animals.
- It is appropriate to shake hands with a person who has a disability, even if they have limited use of their hands or wear an artificial limb.
- If your conversation lasts more than a few minutes, consider sitting down or kneeling to get yourself on the same eye level as the person who uses the wheelchair. It will keep both of you from getting a stiff neck.
- If you have children, they will stare as it's their nature. Talk to the child about people with disabilities, and help them understand why people use wheelchairs. Don't discourage children from asking questions of a person who uses a wheelchair about their wheelchair. Open communication helps overcome fearful or misleading attitudes.
- Bathroom breaks matter. If you plan a gathering or meeting and observe someone in a wheelchair, ensure the person knows where the bathroom is and has access to it.
- Rearrange furniture to create a clear path for wheelchairs.
- Don't hang or lean on a person's wheelchair. Again, remember that it is part of that person's personal body space.

- Speak directly to the person in the wheelchair, not to someone nearby as if the person in the wheelchair does not exist.
- Don't belittle or patronise the person by patting them on the head.
- Give clear directions, including distance, weather conditions and physical obstacles that may hinder the person's travel.
- When a person using a wheelchair "transfers" out of the wheelchair to a chair, toilet, car or bed, do not move the wheelchair out of reaching distance.
- It is okay to use terms like "running along" when speaking to a person who uses a wheelchair. The person is likely to express things the same way.
- Don't assume that using a wheelchair is in itself a tragedy. It is a means of freedom that allows the person to move about independently.
- Only push or lean on a wheelchair with permission.
- Yield and give way to wheelchairs on the move.

*The Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support (CUADS) at UFS offers the following support for people with physical disabilities:*



***Accessible parking.***



***Inclusive bathrooms.***



***Loose desks in auditorium-like lecture halls.***



***Access to elevators in buildings.***



**LOOK OUT FOR OUR OTHER TIP SHEETS ON TOPICS SUCH AS:**

- Learning Difficulties
- Visual Impairments
- Hearing Impairments
- Concessions Guide for UFS Students
- CUADS information leaflet



HELLO

## **KEEP IN TOUCH**

We aim to provide holistic support to UFS students with disabilities, and pride ourselves on being accessible to our students and other university stakeholders.

You can reach the Centre for Universal Access and Disability Support (CUADS) on any of the following platforms:



## **VISIT US ON YOUR CAMPUS**

- **Bloemfontein Campus (BFN):**  
Level 2, Sasol Library (next to the Johannes Stegmann Art Gallery)
- **South Campus (SC):**  
Room D125, Neville Alexander Library
- **QwaQwa Campus (QQ):**  
Room 2013, Intsika Building



## **CALL US**

051 401 3713 (BFN)  
051 505 1355 (SC)  
058 721 5189 (QQ)



## **SEND US AN EMAIL**

[cuads@ufs.ac.za](mailto:cuads@ufs.ac.za)



## **Facebook**

<https://web.facebook.com/Centre-for-Universal-Access-and-Disability-Support-UFS-1509109672744423/>



## **Instagram**

[https://instagram.com/cuads\\_ufs?utm\\_medium=copy\\_link](https://instagram.com/cuads_ufs?utm_medium=copy_link)



## **LinkedIn**

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/cuads-ufs>