

# HOW TO TREAT THE DISABLED

*Etiquette on  
treatment and  
interaction with  
people who are  
mentally or  
physically challenged*

Published By:



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Islam holds those with disabilities and challenges in high esteem. Nabi ﷺ gave special regard to people with disabilities and special needs. Many examples show his immense kindness and compassion towards such people.

When we speak about people with disabilities, able individuals react differently: some with sympathy and concern, and others feel discomfort or disdain. Regrettably, the voices and feelings of the disabled go unnoticed in society, and despite awareness, people with disabilities still face huge hurdles.

It is our responsibility to exemplify the prophetic example, and learn how to support and embrace people with disabilities.

## **PHYSICAL & MENTAL DISABILITES**

A physical disability refers to an impairment or limitation to a person's physical functioning. Many physical disabilities are visible or noticeable, e.g. someone with a mobility challenge in a wheelchair, or a visually impaired person using an aide; however, there are many that are not.

Mental disabilities are usually given less importance, and suffer higher stigma. They can refer to certain psychiatric illnesses and intellectual disorders. Mental illness affects the way a person feels, behaves, thinks, communicates or perceives reality. Not all those with mental illnesses are disabled. Remember that disabilities vary and can be visible or hidden.

# STIGMA

Regrettably, in most communities, people with disabilities are stigmatised. Sadly, people assign blame by implying that a disabled person has incurred Allah's punishment, or was a victim of some defect or witchcraft. Rather than accepting and embracing the individual, they are sometimes shunned and made to feel inferior.

The stigma is often the result of ignorance, false assumptions and negative attitudes. Stigma lies at the source of the discrimination and exclusion experienced by people with disabilities. As a result of being stigmatised by family, society or both, people with disabilities can feel isolated and worthless. They can even take on society's false assumptions and beliefs and self-stigmatise.

Stigma is also nuanced, and can be perpetuated differently,

- **Words** - The stigma that disabled people experience is often exacerbated by negative talk. Stigma is easily spread through derogatory or demeaning words and insensitive remarks. Words like crippled, insane, defected, slow, retarded, etc. are used by people in casual settings to describe individuals with physical and/or mental challenges.
- **Actions** - When we choose to stare, ignore, point or draw negative attention to the individual, to disrespect their personal boundaries or treat them as lesser humans.

# SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

Basic social etiquette requires treating people with disabilities respectfully. For example, speak to the person directly, not to the person accompanying them. Acknowledge and respect the individual's ability to interact and speak on their own behalf.

People with disabilities are human and are as worthy as every other able individual. Recognise their difference in the same way you would recognise anyone else's and treat them normally. Don't talk down to them, literally or figuratively.

When it comes to differentiating between sympathy and empathy there is a fine line between the two. Society at large tends to lean towards sympathy especially in the case of a person with a disability. Showing empathy to someone who is disabled requires seeing things from their perspective. Try to experience the world through their lens.

## REMEDIES THAT WILL HELP DISABLED PEOPLE FEEL MORE ACCEPTED

- **Education** - It is crucial to recognise our inappropriate attitudes and behaviour and to begin the process of unlearning them. It is only through unlearning, that true learning can begin. Treat people with disabilities the way you like to be treated.

- **Be easy** - Everyone wants to make friends, seek happiness and live life to the fullest. People with disabilities aren't any different. Approaching someone with disabilities should never be a source of fear, uncertainty or embarrassment. People with disabilities can have just as much fun as everyone else.
- **Embrace and be Supportive** – Actively include people with disabilities in your institutions, communities and conversations. Think of someone you know with a disability and consider if you are doing everything you can to support them. Ask yourself, 'Can I help them advocate for more accessible spaces?' 'Can I offer my help for their daily tasks?' 'Can I make them feel more heard or included?'

## **AVOID BEHAVIOUR THAT HURTS AND HARMS**

- Do not assume someone does or does not have a disability.

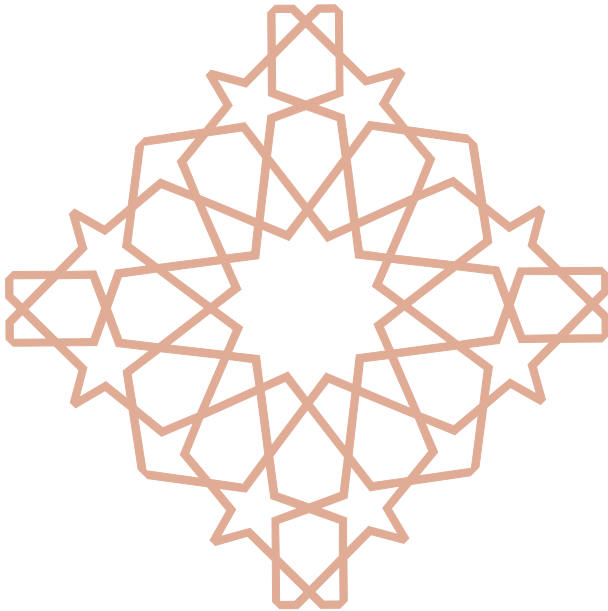
Everyone is different. Those with disabilities might act, think or feel differently than you do on occasions. Tolerate and be considerate towards this because everyone deserves to be treated with respect.

- Do not stare at the person and always ask before you help.

Seeing people with disability in public can be an eye-opening experience. You may glance, but do not stare at someone who has a disability. Simply look at them the same way you look at others.

- Do not assume a person's disability defines who they are.

As human beings, we should take care not to define anyone by their limitations, disability or not. A disabled individual is so much more than what limits them.





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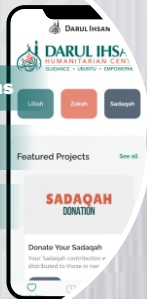
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## About Darul Ihsan

Darul Ihsan Humanitarian Centre provides education, guidance, social, empowerment and welfare services to the community. In providing this service, we adopt a holistic approach, that gives due importance to basic needs as well as human rights and dignity of those that we serve.

## Founding Philosophy

Darul Ihsan Humanitarian Centre is a multi-purpose, humanitarian-services providing organisation. 'Ihsan' means compassion towards mankind and to act with excellence. The Centre was established in the year 2000 with the primary objective of serving humanity and alleviating poverty and hardship locally and abroad. Since its inception, it has developed and established many humanitarian projects and provides a variety of free services to the community.

## Key Objectives

One of the key objectives of the Centre is to promote a better understanding of humanity and peace, thereby serving as a bridge-builder between faiths and communities. Through guidance, Ubuntu and empowerment, the organisation hopes to train and develop the youth to become torch bearers of hope, peace and compassion to humanity.

