



ACCESSIBILITY AND DISABILITY WORKING GROUP

*The Accessibility and Disability working group of
Shambhala International
2013*

Welcoming and Working with Persons who use Mobility Aids or Adaptive Seating

Introduction

About 7% of the U.S. population use some type of mobility aid (can, braces, walker, etc...) and 1.5 million persons use wheelchairs. This situation may be brought about through illness, injury, or simply aging. A person may have required a mobility aid since birth or it may be a recent change requiring significant adjustment in their lifestyle. It is also common for persons to use more than one type of mobility aid depending on the situation. While it is difficult to generalize about any group, there are ways to insure accessibility and full engagement for persons with mobility challenges within the Shambhala community.

This brochure is designed to provide information that helps us see the world from another's perspective and to increase our ability to interact

respectfully and compassionately with someone different from ourselves.

Mobility and the Shambhala Community

Consider your local Shambhala community. Are persons who use mobility aids equally represented? How many people do you see using special seating? Do you regularly see people in wheelchairs? Statistically if your venue is large than 50 people you should see a couple. If not, why? Perhaps you don't see them because the shrine room is not accessible to them? The teachings are for all; it is highly unlikely that persons who have physical problems are not interested in meditation and basic goodness?

It is possible that there are subtle or not so subtle barriers which limit engagement within our environment, our communication with the public, or our verbal/non-verbal interactions with individuals. Because of this we may be turning away people who are interested and motivated to enter the path.

As examples, is your wheelchair accessibility prominently displayed on your centers website and communications? Are uplifted alternatives to gomdens available? Do persons have to ask for a chair? Are chairs always placed in the back? Is a written commitment to accessibility and diversity posted prominently?

A Language Primer

A **Disability** is a condition caused by an accident, trauma, genetics or disease, which may limit a person's mobility, hearing, vision, speech or mental function. A **Handicap** is a physical or attitudinal constraint that is *imposed upon a*

person, regardless of whether that person has a disability. Disabled people do not have to be handicapped, especially if they can find a way around their disability. In working with others, we can apply mindfulness to up-root unhelpful language patterns which overemphasize differences or place the blame of unequal access on persons requiring mobility aids. One suggestion is to put the "person" first in our language; for example, using the term "a person who uses a wheelchair" versus a "wheelchair user". Remember that people requiring mobility aids may not see themselves as disabled or challenged at all. Rather, what they may perceive are extensive environmental barriers to their free mobility. Consider as a worthy goal of society and Shambhalians to take the focus off the "disabled" and promote the creation of "barrier-free" environments that meet the needs of all humans.

Mobility Etiquette: Do's and Don'ts

- Look at and talk directly to everyone with whom we converse.
- Be at eye level with everyone with whom we speak, if possible.
- Move crutches, walkers, canes, or wheelchairs only with the permission of the user. Return the devices as soon as possible.
- Ask "May I help?" when wanting to be helpful. And if given permission to do so, ask "How may I help?" Unsolicited assistance is rude and intrusive.
- Ask if and how we can help in buffet lines.
- Respect everyone's individual space. Do not lean on someone's wheelchair.
- Allow children to ask questions and allow the person being questioned to answer.

- When assisting a wheelchair user go up or down more than one step tilt the wheelchair back at all times while descending or ascending the stairs.
- Learn the location of wheelchair-accessible ramps, rest rooms, elevators, doors, water fountains, and telephones.
- Relax and smile! Everyone responds to a smile and a warm "hello".
- When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider distance and physical obstacles (curbs, doors, stairs, etc.).

Seating Arrangements

Having uplifted and appropriate chairs available should be a high priority for all centres. In selecting chairs, consider the dynamics of a proper sitting position over aesthetics. Chairs should have sufficient cushioning (3-4 inches) and the front of the chair seat should not be higher than the back. Occasionally a person may need a chair with arm rests. Similarly, a person may need to place a leg up, so having a footrest or two available would be helpful. Place wheelchairs and chairs at the end of rows at various distances from the front, not all in the back. Place two chairs together at the end of rows to accommodate couples or friends. For all members, provide a variety of floor seating materials including zabutons, zafus, gomdens, meditation benches, cushions, and small pillows.

Not Just In The Shrine Room

For an electric scooter weighing over 200 pounds even one step may prove to be too great a barrier. Ramps, elevators, automatic doors, lowered (or raised) water fountains, curb cuts, and parking that is flat and close to the entrance

are some examples that create an atmosphere that is environmentally welcoming and accessible to someone with mobility limitations. Gravel, flagstone, and brick walkways may cause great difficulty for persons using mobility aids.

Top 10 Annoyances for Persons who use Wheelchairs

This list, originally posted at the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, provides a indication of the frustrations endured by those using mobility aids. We may recall making just such a mistake.

1. Able-bodied people parking in accessible parking spaces.
2. Accessible bathroom stalls being used by an able-bodied person
3. Talking over my head as if I'm not here.
4. Continuing to insist on helping me after I have said no thanks
5. Congratulating me for things like going to the grocery store like it's worth an Olympic medal
6. Strangers asking me what happened to me
7. Not inviting me to an event because you are protecting me from some frustration (let me figure it out)
8. Patting me on my head. Don't.
9. Holding on to the back of my chair so I can't move.
10. Speaking slowly to me because I'm in a wheelchair.

What Else Can I Do?

- Step up to the plate and become an accessibility coordinator for your centre.
- Insure that all registration forms include a section on accessibility needs.

- Display accessibility prominently on website and on program communications.
- Post a written statement of commitment to accessibility and diversity at your centre and on your centre's website..
- Explore accessibility issues with other members of your centre.

About the Accessibility and Disability working group of Shambhala international

We are the Shambhala International working group for accessibility and disability, part of the Shambhala Office of the Societal Health and Well-Being. We are charged with providing information for making Shambhala International accessible, physically, in print and electronically.

Contact us

We have several websites:

- The A & D working group Shambhala network group <http://shambhalanetwork.org/groups/accessibility-and-disability/forum/>
- The Accessibility and disability network web: <http://www.shambhala.org/community/da.php>

The websites, besides containing discussion forums also have lots of useful downloadable documents (like this one)

You can email us at accessibility.in.shambhala@gmail.com

or write to:

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