

# Purple Tuesday

Improving the disabled customer experience



Hello, can I help you?

[PurpleTuesday.Co](https://PurpleTuesday.Co)

The purpose of **Hello, can I help you?** is very simple.

It is about helping you, as a member of staff in your organisation, to feel more confident in providing good customer service to disabled people, as you would with all customers.



# About

Research by Purple Tuesday shows that the fear of unintentionally offending a disabled customer by saying or doing the 'wrong thing' is the biggest barrier for front-line staff using their customer service knowledge and experience. Swerving a first conversation feels like the less risky thing to do. This is not because they don't want to be helpful, or are prejudiced, but merely because they don't feel confident not to say the wrong thing.

This short guide has been designed to support you to become more confident when interacting with disabled customers. It provides some handy hints, tips and interesting facts to complement both your existing experience and the wider training and development provided by your organisation.

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'Hello, can I help you?' is part of a resource pack produced for Purple Tuesday: an initiative to change the customer experience for disabled people.

## Did you know?

- 17% of the global population (over a billion people) have a disability have a disability – that’s a lot of disabled customers!
  - 80% of disabled people have ‘invisible’ or hidden impairments. So, four in every five disabled customers that come into your store or visit your company website may need additional support from you, but this might not be obvious immediately.
  - Only 8% of disabled people use a wheelchair.
  - 75% of disabled people and their families have left a shop or website because of poor customer service and/or accessibility issues.
  - The collective spending power of disabled people and their families (known as the ‘Purple Pound’) is valued at \$8 trillion worldwide per year. That is a lot of disposable income to be spent in your store or online.
  - Health conditions and disabilities can fluctuate, so the support a person might need on one day could be different on another!
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## The principles of good customer service

You will recognise all the points below from the training and development you have already undertaken – but it’s important to remember that these apply to disabled customers:

- Treat customers as you would want to be treated.
- Stand in the shoes of customers to understand their perspective. Be proactive in providing support rather than reactive.
- If using the phone or email, return enquiries promptly and politely, no matter how big or small the matter.
- Learn from your experiences of interacting with lots of different customers and ‘lock away’ those nuggets of good practice.



## Things you should say

We know that using the right language and etiquette with disabled customers is a key concern for staff. For 99% of customers it is all about the context rather than what is said, but here are some useful pointers:

- Refer to people as 'disabled people' or 'a person with a disability' rather than the less-able or handicapped person.
- Avoid phrases like 'suffers from' which suggests discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness. Sometimes there is chronic pain, but the preference is 'living with' dementia or a health condition, etc.
- Try to avoid associating negative stereotypes with disability. For example, 'deaf to our pleas' or 'blind drunk'.
- People with mental health issues have a condition rather than being 'crazy', 'mad' or 'sad'.
- People without a disability are generally referred to as non-disabled rather than able-bodied (which implies something better).

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## Some practical hints and tips for you

There is a range of little things you can do which would have a big impact on the disabled customer's experience. Here are some examples:

- If you are talking to a wheelchair user, talk to them directly and make eye contact with them rather than the floor, or the person they are with.
- Let a blind person reach out for your arm to guide them around rather than you giving them your arm.
- In a noisy environment, when you approach a customer ask them if they want to step to a quieter place to start the conversation. For a person with a mental health condition (and plenty others as well!) it may well be the difference between staying, or simply walking out.
- Teach yourself hello and goodbye in sign language. It makes such a difference to a deaf person, and you might find you want to learn even more useful phrases.
- When talking to people with autism and/or Asperger's stick to clear facts rather than providing information that then needs interpreting. For example, "we have this jumper in red, navy and black" rather than "we have this jumper in lots of colours".



# Things you will be pleased to know



Blind people will 'see you later'.



Deaf people do 'hear what you are saying'.



Wheelchair users love to 'go for a walk' and often 'have to run' if they are busy.



People with mental health conditions know we live in a crazy world.



Amputees have 'got to hand it to you' and sometimes 'need a leg up'.

As long as these are said with good intentions and no malice, most disabled people are fine with them, but will tell you if not.



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