

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

Tips for Interacting with People with Disabilities



More information found at:

www.accessforward.ca

People who are Deafblind

A person who is deafblind has some degree of both hearing and vision loss. People who are deafblind are often accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps with communication. Intervenors are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client.

Tips:

- Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.
- The customer is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note.

People who use Assistive Devices

An assistive device is a piece of equipment a person with a disability uses to help with daily living, for example, a wheelchair or walker, white cane, hearing aid, an oxygen tank or communication board.

Tips:

- Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
- Don't move assistive devices or equipment (such as canes, walkers) out of the person's reach.

Home and Community Support Services Grey Bruce offers portable wheelchairs, portable rollators and voice amplifiers to support our clients. The organization is committed to enhancing its available assisted devices as needs are identified. Assisted devices are available at our main service delivery sites as well as through our mobile staff. This information is included in orientation for staff and volunteers. Make sure you know how to access and use them. Instruction manuals/instruction sheets are available where the device is located or stored.

Some examples of devices that Home and Community Support Services Grey Bruce offers include:

- mobility devices, such as a manual wheelchair
- lift, which raises or lowers people who use mobility devices
- technology that makes it easier for people with disabilities to communicate or access information, such as certain computer software or an amplification system
- adjustable desk or workstation, which changes the height or tilt of a writing surface
- accessible interactive kiosk, which might offer information in other formats such as through audio headsets

People who use Service Animals

There are various types of service animals who support people with various types of disabilities.

- People with vision loss may use a guide dog.
- Hearing alert animals help people with hearing loss.
- Other service animals are trained to alert a person to an oncoming seizure, or to assist people with autism, mental health disabilities, physical disabilities and other disabilities.

Under the Customer Service Standard, there are no restrictions on what type of animal can be used as a service animal.

An animal is considered a service animal if:

- You can easily identify it's a service animal through visual indicators, such as when it wears a harness or vest, or
- The person with a disability provides documentation from a regulated health professional that confirms they need the service animal for reasons relating to their disability.

Tips:

- Don't touch or distract a service animal, it's not a pet. It's a working animal and has to pay attention at all times.
- If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, you may ask your customer. You may ask to see their documentation from a regulated health professional.
- The customer is responsible for the care and supervision of their service animal. However, you can provide water for the animal if your customer requests it.

If another person's health or safety could be seriously impacted by the presence of a service animal, such as a severe allergy, please speak to your supervisor for guidance.

If you cannot easily identify that it's a service animal:

- Don't make assumptions. You can ask the person to provide document from a regulated health professional that states that they require the animal because of their disability.
- If the person shows you documentation, then they must be allowed to be accompanied by the service animal.
- The person is not required to disclose the disability or demonstrate how the animal assists them.

People with Hearing Loss

People who have hearing loss may identify in different ways. They may be deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. These terms are used to describe different levels of hearing or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

A person with hearing loss may have preferred ways to communicate, for example, through sign language, by lip reading or using a pen and paper.

Tips:

- Once the customer has self-identified as having hearing loss, make sure you face the customer when talking and that you are in a well-lit area so the person can see you clearly.
- As needed, attract the person's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- Maintain eye contact. Use body language, gestures and facial expression to help you communicate.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or if possible, move to a quieter area.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example, using a pen and paper.
- When using a sign language interpreter, look and speak directly to the customer, not to the interpreter. For example, say "What would you like?" not "Ask her what she'd like."

People with Developmental Disabilities

Developmental disabilities (such as Down syndrome) or intellectual disabilities, can mildly or profoundly limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities or live independently.

Tips:

- Don't make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do.
- Don't exaggerate your speech or speak in a patronizing way.

- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- If you're not sure of what is being said to you, confirm by summarizing or repeating what was said, or politely ask them to repeat it – don't pretend if you're not sure.
- Ask the customer if they would like help reading your material or completing a form and wait for them to accept the offer of assistance.
- Be patient and allow extra time if needed.

People with a Support Person

A support person can be a paid personal support worker, an intervenor, volunteer, family member or friend. A support person might help your customer with communication, mobility, personal care or with accessing your services.

A person with a disability is permitted to bring their support person with them to any area of your premises that is open to the public or to third parties.

There are no service fees for the inclusion of a support person. However, we ask that a support person be pre-registered for the service, as appropriate.

Tips:

- If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting service, or simply ask.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their support person.
- Be familiar with the organization's policy on fees or fares for support persons.
- It's good practice to confirm with your customer that they want the support person to be present while confidential matters are being discussed.

People with Learning Disabilities

The term “learning disabilities” refers to a range of disorders. One example is dyslexia, which affects how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when the person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

People with learning disabilities just learn in a different way.

Tips:

- Be patient and allow extra time if needed. People with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, or to understand and respond.
- Try to provide information in a way that works for your customer. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.
- Be willing to rephrase or explain something again in another way, if needed.

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Tips:

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- Don’t exaggerate your speech or speak in a patronizing way.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- If you’re not sure of what is being said to you, confirm by summarizing or repeating what was said, or politely ask them to repeat it – don’t pretend if you’re not sure.

- Ask the customer if they would like help reading your material or completing a form and wait for them to accept the offer of assistance.
- Be patient and allow extra time if needed.

People with Mental Health Disabilities

Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. A person with a mental health disability may experience depression or acute mood swings, anxiety due to phobias or panic disorder, or hallucinations. It may affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things.

You may not know someone has this disability unless you are told. Stigma and lack of understanding are major barriers for people with mental health disabilities.

Tips:

- If you sense or know that a customer has a mental health disability, treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident, calm and reassuring.
- Listen carefully, and work with the customer to meet their needs.
- Respect your customer's personal space.
- Limit distractions that could affect your customer's ability to focus or concentrate – loud noise, crowded areas and interruptions could cause stress.
- Respond to the person's immediate behaviour and needs. Don't be confrontational. If needed, set limits with the person as you would others. For example, "If you scream, I will not be able to talk to you."

People with Physical or Mobility Devices

Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with arthritis may use a cane or walker, while someone with a heart or lung condition may not use a mobility device but may have difficulty walking longer distances.

Tips:

- Ask before you help. People with disabilities often have their own ways of doing things.
- Don't touch or move a person's equipment (e.g., walker, wheelchair) without permission.
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level.
- Think ahead and remove any items that may cause a physical barrier, such as boxes left in an aisle.
- If the service counter at your place of business is too high for a person using a wheelchair to see over, step around it to provide service. Have a clipboard handy if filling in forms or if a signature is required.
- Keep in mind that a person's physical disability may not be visible or obvious. For example, a person may have difficulty standing for long periods of time and may ask to sit while waiting to be served.

People with Speech or Language Difficulties

Cerebral palsy, stroke, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or express themselves. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

Tips:

- Don't assume that a person who has difficulty speaking doesn't understand you.



- Speak directly to the customer and not to their companion or support person.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered “yes” or “no.”
- If the person uses a communication device, take a moment to read visible instructions for communicating with them.
- Be patient. Don’t interrupt or finish your customer’s sentences.
- Confirm what the person has said by summarizing or repeating what you’ve understood and allow the person to respond – don’t pretend if you’re not sure.
- If necessary, provide other ways for the customer to contact you, such as email.

People with Vision Loss

Vision loss can restrict someone’s ability to read documents or signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some people may use a guide dog, a white cane, or a support person such as a sighted guide, but others may not.

Tips:

- When you know someone has vision loss, don’t assume the individual can’t see you. Not everyone with vision loss is totally blind, many have some vision.
- Identify yourself when you approach and speak directly to your customer if they are with a companion.
- Ask if they would like you to read any printed information out loud to them, such as a menu, a bill or schedule of fees.
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed. If they accept, lead – don’t pull.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the surroundings. For example, if you’re approaching stairs or an obstacle, say so.
- If you need to leave the customer, let them know by telling them you’ll be back or saying good-bye.

- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room – guide them to a comfortable location.

Serving People with Disabilities – At Home

Tips for providing at-home service:

- Don't arrive unexpectedly. Confirm your arrival time in advance.
- Respect requests made by a customer with a disability to accommodate their needs. For example, a person with an environmental sensitivity may require that you refrain from wearing scented products in their home.
- Be patient. You may need to wait a few moments for your customer to open the door.
- Introduce yourself. Some customers may not be able to read identification cards and may want you to use a password. Check before you visit.
- Keep your customer informed of what you're doing.
- Make sure that you leave the home exactly as it was when you arrived. For example, someone with vision loss will expect that their furniture is in the same place and could trip if you've moved the sofa.
- Remember that you are a guest in their home and must respect how they choose to live, where they place their assistive devices, etc. unless it has been determined that they are in an unsafe situation.

Serving People with Disabilities – Over the Phone

Tips for providing over-the-phone service:

- Speak naturally, clearly and directly.
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences. Give your customer time to explain or respond.

- If you're not sure what is being said to you, politely ask the customer to repeat it, or repeat or rephrase what you heard and ask if you have understood correctly.
- If the customer is using an interpreter or a telephone relay service, speak naturally to the customer, not to the interpreter.
- If you encounter a situation where, after numerous attempts, you and your customer cannot communicate with each other, consider making alternate arrangements that may work best for them.
- If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your goods, services or facilities, a good starting point is to ask "How can I help you?"