

 <p><b>Policy &amp; Procedure</b></p>	Policy Name: <b>Accessibility Best Practices</b>	Manual  <b>Administration</b>
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## Best Practices

Accessible Customer Service follows four basic principles:

- Dignity
- Independence
- Integration
- Equal Opportunity

What can I do to help people with disabilities access our services?

- Ask how you can help
- Offer a variety of methods of communication
- Understand the nature and scope of the service you offer

## Acceptable Terms for Use When Talking About Disabilities

The Following is an excerpt from the Ministry of Community and Social Services  
[\[http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/how/howto\\_choose.htm\]](http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/mcss/english/how/howto_choose.htm)

Words can influence and reinforce the public's perception of people with disabilities. They can create either a positive view of people with disabilities or an indifferent, negative depiction.

Here are some general tips that can help make your communication and interactions with or about people with all types of disabilities more successful.

- Use *disability* or *disabled*, not *handicap* or *handicapped*.
- Never use terms such as *retarded*, *dumb*, *psycho*, *moron* or *crippled*. These words are very demeaning and disrespectful to people with disabilities.
- Remember to put people first. It is proper to say *person with a disability*, rather than *disabled person*.
- If you don't know someone or if you are not familiar with the disability, it's better to wait until the individual describes his/her situation to you, rather than to make your own assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.

## Providing Customer Service for Persons with Disabilities

**Physical** – Physical disabilities include a range of functional limitations from minor difficulties in moving or coordinating one part of the body, through muscle weakness, tremors, and paralysis. Physical disabilities can be congenital such as Muscular Dystrophy; or acquired, such as tendonitis. A physical disability may affect an individual's ability to:

- Perform manual tasks such as holding a pen, turning a key or grip a door knob
- Move around independently
- Control the speed or coordination of movements
- Reach, pull or manipulate objects
- Have strength or endurance

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

- Speak normally and directly to your customer. Don't speak to someone who is with them
- People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space, don't touch, move or lean on them
- Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.)
- Keep ramps and corridors free of clutter
- If a counter is too high or wide, step around it to provide service
- Provide seating for those that cannot stand in line
- Be Patient. Customers will identify their needs to you.

**Hearing** – Hearing loss can cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words. A person who is deaf, deafened or hard-of hearing may be unable to:

- Use a public telephone
- Understand speech in noisy environments
- Pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. Remember, customers who are deaf or hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating.

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand
- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout. Speak clearly
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood
- Face the person and keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth

- Deaf people may use a sign language interpreter to communicate- always direct your attention to the Deaf person –not the interpreter
- Any personal (e.g. financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds
- If necessary, write notes back and forth to share information
- Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times

**Deaf - Blindness** – Deaf – Blindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss. The result for a person who is deaf-blind is significant difficulty accessing information and performing daily activities. Deaf-blindness interferes with communication, learning, orientation and mobility. People who are deaf-blind communicate using various sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, communication boards and any combination thereof.

Many people who are deaf-blind use the services of an Intervener who relay information and facilitate auditory and visual information and act as sighted guides.

#### Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating.

Interveners are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deaf-blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- A customer who is deaf-blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them
- Do not touch or address the service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times
- Never touch a person who is deaf-blind suddenly or without permission unless it's an emergency
- Understand that communication can take some time- be patient.
- Direct your attention to your customer, not the Intervener.

**Vision** – Vision disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind; many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Vision loss may result in:

- Difficulty reading or seeing faces
- Difficultly maneuvering in unfamiliar places
- Inability to differentiate colours or distances
- A narrow field of vision
- The need for bright light, or contrast
- Night blindness

### Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

Vision disabilities may restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision disability, while others may use a guide dog and/or white cane.

- Verbally identify yourself before making physical contact
- If the person uses a service animal- do not touch or approach the animal- it is working.
- Verbally describe the setting, form, location as necessary
- Offer your arm to guide the person. Do not grab or pull.
- Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it is an emergency
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye

**Intellectual** - Intellectual disabilities affect a person's ability to think and reason. It may be caused by genetic factors such as Downs Syndrome, exposure to environmental toxins, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, brain trauma or psychiatric disorders.

A person with an intellectual disorder may have difficulty with:

- Understanding spoken and written information
- Conceptual information
- Perception of sensory information
- Memory

### Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things that most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.

As much as possible, treat your customers with an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate your treating them with respect.

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do
- Use clear, simple language
- Be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information
- Remember that the person is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decisions
- Be patient and verify your understanding
- If you can't understand what is being said, don't pretend. Just ask again
- Provide one piece of information at a time
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or attendant

**Speech** – Speech disabilities involve the partial or total loss of the ability to speak.

Typical disabilities include problems with:

- Pronunciation
- Pitch and loudness
- Hoarseness or breathiness
- Stuttering or slurring

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

- Where possible, communicate in a quiet environment
- Give the person your full attention. Don't interrupt or finish their sentences.
- Ask them to repeat as necessary, or to write their message.
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'
- Verify your understanding
- Patience, respect and willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools

**Learning** - Learning disabilities include a range of disorders that affect verbal and non-verbal information acquisition, retention, understanding and processing. People with a learning disability may have average or above average intelligence, but take in and process information and express knowledge in different ways.

Learning disabilities may result in difficulties with:

- Reading
- Problem solving
- Time management
- Way finding
- Processing information.

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

- Learning disabilities are generally invisible and ability to function varies greatly
- Respond to any requests for verbal information, assistance in filling in forms, etc. with courtesy.
- Allow extra time to complete tasks if necessary.

**Mental Health** – Mental Health disabilities include a range of disorders, however there are three main types of mental health disability:

- Anxiety
- Mood
- Behavioral

People with mental health disabilities may seem edgy or irritated, act aggressively, be perceived as pushy or abrupt, be unable to make a decision, start laughing or get angry for no apparent reason.

Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:

- Treat each person as an individual. Ask what would make him/her the most comfortable and respect his/her needs to the maximum extent possible.
- Try to reduce stress and anxiety in situations.
- Stay calm and courteous, even if the customer exhibits unusual behavior, focus on the service they need and how you can help.

**Smell** – Smell disabilities can involve the inability to sense smells or a hypersensitivity to odors and smells. A person with a smelling disability may have allergies to certain odors, scents or chemicals or may be unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes and spoiled food.

**Touch** – Touch/ Tactile disabilities can affect a person’s ability to sense texture, temperature, vibration or pressure. Touch sensations may be reduced or heightened resulting in a hypersensitivity to touch, temperature, or the opposite, numbness and the inability to feel touch sensations

**Taste** - Taste disabilities can limit the experience of the four primary taste sensations; sweet, bitter, salty and sour. A person with a taste disability may be unable to identify spoiled food or noxious substances.

**Other** - Other disabilities may result from a range of other conditions, accidents, illnesses and diseases including ALS, asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDs, environmental sensitivities, seizure disorders, heart disease, stroke and joint replacement.

Disabilities are not always visible or easy to distinguish.

**For More Information**

To review the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, Ontario Regulation 429/07 in its entirety, please visit:

[Ontario Regulation 429/07](#)

For additional information visit the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) website at:

<http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/mcass>

For more information regarding preferred language when dealing with people with disabilities, please visit:

[MCSS: Talk About Disabilities - Choose the Right Word](#)