



**ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE**

**BEST PRACTICES AND PROCEDURES**



## Communication - Using Inclusive Language

Inappropriate Language	Appropriate Language
the disabled	people with disabilities, the disability community (disabled, an adjective, must be accompanied by a noun)
the blind, the deaf	the blind community, the deaf community
crippled, suffers from, afflicted with, stricken with, victim of, invalid	has a disability, is a person with a disability, physically disabled, walks with a cane, uses leg braces
normal person, healthy, whole	non-disabled, able-bodied, person without disabilities
impaired, impairment	disabled, has a disability
handicap parking, disabled parking	accessible parking, disability parking
wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair person	Wheelchair user, person who uses a wheelchair
paraplegic, quadriplegic	Man with paraplegia, woman who is paralyzed, person with spinal cord injury
hearing impaired, hearing impairment	Deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened
visually impaired, visual impairment	Low vision, partially sighted, blind
Dumb, mute	Person who is unable to speak, has difficulty speaking, uses synthetic speech, is non-vocal, non-verbal
stutterer, tongue-tied	Person who has a speech or communication disability
Epileptic	Person with epilepsy, person with seizure disorder
fit, attack	Seizure, epileptic episode or event
Crazy, insane, nuts, psycho	Person with mental illness, person living with mental illness
Retard, mentally defective, Down's person	Person with an intellectual, cognitive, or developmental disability
Slow learner, retarded	Has a learning disability, person with specific learning disability
Dwarf, midget	Person of small stature, short stature, little person
Birth defect	Congenital disability, disabled from birth
Homebound	Stay-at-home, hard for the person to get out

## People Who Use Wheelchairs or Who Have Mobility Impairments

People who use wheelchairs have different disabilities and varying abilities. Some can use their arms and hands. Some can get out of their wheelchairs and even walk for short distances.

- Wheelchair users are people, not equipment. Don't lean over someone in a wheelchair.
- Don't push or touch a person's wheelchair; it's part of his/her personal space. If you help someone down a curb without waiting for instructions, you may dump him/her out of the chair. You may detach the chair's parts if you lift it by the handles or footrest.
- Keep the ramps and wheelchair-accessible doors to your building unlocked and unblocked. Displays should not be in front of entrances, wastebaskets should not be in the middle of aisles and boxes should not be stored on ramps.
- Make sure that the building is accessible. Ramps and elevators should be available to use in lieu of stairs, and doorways and doors should be accessible.
- Accessible doors should be easy to push and in proper working condition. Routinely check and maintain all accessible devices/entrances (including elevators).
- If your building has different routes through it, be sure that signs direct wheelchair users to the most accessible ways around the facility. People who walk with a cane or crutches also need to know the easiest way to get around a place, but stairs may be easier for them than a ramp. Ensure that staff can answer questions about the most accessible way around the building and grounds.
- If the nearest public restroom is not accessible or is located on an inaccessible floor, allow the person in a wheelchair to use a private or staff washroom.
- Be aware of wheelchair users' reach limits. Place as many items as possible within their grasp. Make sure that there is a clear path of travel to shelves and display racks. When talking to a wheelchair user, grab your own chair and sit at his/her level. If that's not possible, stand at a slight distance, so that he/she isn't straining his/her neck to make eye contact with you.
- If the service counter is too high for a wheelchair user to see over, step around it to provide service. Have a clipboard handy if filling in forms or providing signatures is necessary.
- People who use canes or crutches need their arms to balance themselves, so never grab them. People who have limited mobility may lean on a door for support as they open it. Pushing the door open from behind or unexpectedly opening the door may cause them to fall. Even pulling out or pushing in a chair may present a problem. Always ask before offering help.
- If you offer a seat to a person who has limited mobility, keep in mind that chairs with arms or with higher seats are easier for some people to use.

- Falls are a big problem for people who have limited mobility. Be sure to set out adequate warning signs after washing floors. Also put out mats on rainy or snowy days to keep the floors as dry as possible. (Make sure they don't bunch up and make the floor impassable for wheelchair users.)
- Clear external walkways of debris and during inclement weather conditions.
- People who do not have a visible disability may have needs related to their mobility. For example a person with a respiratory or heart condition may have trouble walking long distances or walking quickly. Be sure that there are ample benches for people to sit and rest on.
- Some people have limited use of their hands, wrists or arms. Be prepared to offer assistance with reaching for, grasping or lifting objects, opening doors and display cases and operating vending machines and other equipment.
- In work environments with high patron traffic and long line-ups, take measures to ensure the safety and satisfaction of customers with disabilities. For example, post a general sign in the waiting area asking customers to "Please respect the person in front of you and keep a safe distance between yourself and others in line. Thank-you."

## **People who are Blind**

People who are blind know how to orient themselves and get around on the street. They are competent to travel unassisted, though they may use a cane or guide dog. A person may have a visual disability that is not obvious. Be prepared to offer assistance when asked.

- Identify yourself before you make physical contact with a person who is blind. Tell him/her your name and your role if it's appropriate. Be sure to introduce him/her to others who are in the group.
- If a new customer or employee is blind or visually impaired, offer him/her a tour of the facility.
- If you have changed the facility (i.e. rearranged furniture), be sure to notify your customers who are blind.
- People who are blind need their arms for balance, so offer your arm—don't take his/hers—if he/she needs to be guided.
- If the person has a guide dog, walk on the side opposite the dog. As you are walking, describe the setting, noting any obstacles, such as stairs or a crack in the sidewalk. Other hazards: revolving doors, half-opened filing cabinet or doors, and objects protruding from the wall at head level such as hanging plants or lamps. If you are going to give a warning, be specific. Hollering, "Look out!" doesn't tell a person if he/she should stop, run, duck or jump.
- Do not pet guide dogs or service animals because they might lose their concentration, which could put their owners in danger.
- If you are giving directions, give specific, non-visual information. Rather than say, "Turn right once you reach the pet food section," which assumes

the person knows where the pet food is, say, "Walk forward to the end of this aisle and turn right."

- Be sure to use words rather than gestures to assist the person.
- If you need to leave a person who is blind, inform him/her first and let him/her know where the exit is, then leave him/her near a wall, table, or some other landmark. The middle of a room will seem like the middle of nowhere to him/her.
- When handing multiple items to a person who is blind, let the individual know which item is on top, in the middle, on the bottom etc.
- Don't touch the person's cane. The cane is part of the individual's personal space. If the person puts the cane down, do not move it. Let him/her know if it's in the way.
- Offer to read written information to customers who are blind. Count out change so that they know which bills are which.
- When speaking in a group of people, all people who are speaking should identify themselves individually.
- Ensure all doorways are accessible and that all accessible devices are in proper working order. Clear all walkways of debris and use mats for slippery surfaces.
- Maintain and clear all debris from external areas of the building and use precautionary/safety measures in inclement weather (i.e. mats, salt icy surfaces, etc.)
- If you serve food to a person who is blind, let him/her know where it is on the plate according to a clock orientation (twelve o'clock is further from them, six o'clock is nearest). Remove garnishes and anything that is not edible from the plate. Some patrons may ask you to cut their food; this can be done in the restaurant's kitchen before the meal is served.

## **People with Low Vision**

A person who has low vision may need written material in large print. A clear font with appropriate spacing is just as important as the type size. Labels and signs should be clearly lettered, have colour contrasts. It is easiest for most people with low vision impairments to read bold white letters on black background. Avoid using all uppercase letters because it is more difficult for people with low vision to distinguish the end of a sentence.

- Good lighting is important, but it shouldn't be too bright. In fact, very shiny paper or walls can produce a glare that disturbs people's eyes.
- Keep walkways clear of obstructions. If people with low vision regularly use your facility as customers, inform them about any physical changes, such as rearranged furniture, equipment or other items that have been moved.

## People who are Deaf or Have a Hearing Loss

American Sign Language (ASL) is often used to communicate by people who are deaf or have a hearing loss. ASL is an entirely different language from English however and lip reading is difficult for people who are deaf, if their first language is ASL. This is because the majority of sounds in English are formed inside the mouth and it's hard to lip read a second language.

People who are hard of hearing communicate in English. They use some hearing but may rely on amplification and/or seeing the speaker's lips to communicate effectively.

There is a range of communication preferences and styles among people with hearing loss. A person with a hearing loss or cochlear implant will usually let you know what works best for them. Some may also use writing and assistive listening devices to help improve communication.

- When the exchange of information is complex, the most effective way to communicate with a native signer is through a qualified sign language interpreter.
- For a simple interaction, writing back and forth is usually okay. However, let the individual choose which communication method is preferred.
- Follow the person's cues to find out if he/she prefers sign language, gesturing, writing or speaking. If you have trouble understanding the speech of a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, let him/her know. Keep a pen and paper handy and also offer alternate forms of communication as an option, such as email correspondence.
- When using a sign-language interpreter, look directly at the person who is deaf, and maintain eye contact to be polite. Talk directly to the person, rather than to the interpreter.
- People who are deaf need to be included in the decision-making process for issues that affect them; don't decide for them.
- Before speaking to a person who is deaf or hard of hearing, make sure that you get his/her attention. Depending on the situation, you can extend your arm and wave your hand, tap him/her on the shoulder or flicker the lights.
- Rephrase, rather than repeat sentences that the person doesn't understand.
- When talking, face the person. A quiet, well-lit room is most conducive to effective communication. If you are in front of the light source—such as a window—with your back to it, the glare may obscure your face and make it difficult for the person who is hard of hearing to lip read.
- Speak clearly. Most people who are hard of hearing count on watching people's lips as they speak to help them understand. Avoid chewing gum, smoking or obscuring your mouth with your hand while speaking.
- There is no need to shout at a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. If the person uses a hearing aid, it will be calibrated to normal voice levels; your shout will just sound distorted.

- People who are deaf (and some who are hard of hearing or have speech disabilities) make and receive calls with the assistance of a device called a TTY (short for teletypewriter; also called a TDD). A TTY is a small device with a keyboard, a paper printer or a visual display screen and acoustic couplers (for telephone receiver).
- When a TTY user calls a business that does not have a TTY, the person can place the call through a relay service. Likewise, a business that does not have a TTY can reach a customer who is a TTY user through the relay service. If you receive a relay call, the operator will identify it as such. Please do not hang up, be patient; TTY calls can involve delays.

## **People with Speech Disabilities**

A person who has had a stroke, is severely hard of hearing, uses a voice prosthesis or has a stammer or other type of speech disability may be difficult to understand.

- Give the person your full attention. Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences. If you have trouble understanding, don't nod. Just ask him to repeat. In most cases the person won't mind and will appreciate your effort to hear what he has to say.
- If you are not sure whether you have understood, you can repeat for verification.
- If, after trying, you still cannot understand the person, ask him to write it down or to suggest another way of facilitating communication.
- A quiet environment makes communication easier.
- Don't tease or laugh at a person with a speech disability. The ability to communicate effectively and to be taken seriously is important for all of us.

## **People with Cerebral Palsy**

As a result of injury to the central nervous system, people with Cerebral Palsy (CP) have difficulty controlling their muscles. The effect on the person's body can range from slight (walking with a limp) to severe (paralysis of the lower and upper limbs). Everyone is different.

- Some people with CP may have slurred speech or involuntary body movements. Be patient when speaking to someone with speech delays. Communication devices may be used.
- There are varying degrees of CP, from mild to severe. Don't assume that the individual has speech or visual impairments; many forms of CP involve muscular or mobility difficulties only. Follow the same rules as when assisting an individual with mobility issues (keep walkways clear, cover slippery surfaces, etc), as people with CP are prone to falls and balance/coordination issues may be involved.

## **Hidden Disabilities**

Not all disabilities are apparent. A person may make a request or act in a way that seems strange to you. That request or behaviour may be disability-related.

For example, you may give seemingly simple verbal directions to someone, but the person asks you to write the information down. He/she may have a learning disability that makes written communication easier for him/her. Or an apparently healthy person may ask to sit, rather than stand, in line. This person may be fatigued from a medical condition, or may be feeling the effects of medication.

Even though these disabilities are hidden, they are real. Please respect the person's needs and requests whenever possible.

## **Epilepsy (Seizure Disorders)**

Epilepsy is a neurological condition characterized by seizures that happen when the electrical system of the brain malfunctions. The seizures may be convulsive, or the person may appear to be in a trance. During complex partial seizures, the person may walk or make other movements while he is, in effect, unconscious.

- If a person is having a seizure, you cannot do anything to stop it. If he/she has fallen and is having convulsions, be sure his/her head is protected and wait for the seizure to end. Do not touch the individual or attempt to hold him/her down.
- When a seizure has ended, the person may feel disoriented and embarrassed. Try to ensure that he/she has privacy to collect him/herself.
- Minor seizures may involve the person stopping and staring for a few seconds or minutes. Do not draw unnecessary attention to this as it could make the individual feel embarrassed or uncomfortable.
- Be aware that beepers and strobe lights can trigger seizures in some people.
- Complex seizures involving convulsions may require the need for medical intervention or support. Follow your company's guidelines and policies regarding First Aid and Emergency Situations.

## **Mental Health Disabilities**

People with mental health disabilities may at times have difficulty coping with certain tasks or interactions. Their disorder may interfere with their ability to feel, think or relate to others. One of the main obstacles people with mental health disabilities face is the attitudes and preconceptions that people have about them. Because it is a hidden disability, chances are you will not even realize that the person has a mental health issue.

- Stress can affect the person's ability to function. Try to keep the pressure of the situation to a minimum.
- People who have mental health disabilities have varying personalities and different ways of coping with their disability. Some may have trouble picking up on social cues; others may be hypersensitive. One person may be very energetic, while someone else may appear sluggish. Treat each person as an individual. Ask what will make him/her most comfortable and respect his/her needs and requests.
- Do not draw attention to, comment on, criticize or laugh at an individual who may be displaying inappropriate behaviour. Remember that every person deserves to be treated with respect and dignity.
- In a crisis, stay calm and be supportive as you would with anyone. Ask how you can help and find out if there is a support person who can be sent for, or take the appropriate safety precautions. Follow your company's policies and procedures.
- If an individual has a phobia, try to respect the person's requests and remove any objects (when appropriate) that may be causing their anxiety and discomfort.

## **Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities**

People with developmental disabilities and intellectual disabilities may have difficulties learning and applying what they have learned from one situation to another.

- Speak to the person using clear language and concrete concepts. Help him/her understand a complex idea by breaking it down into smaller parts.
- Don't use baby talk, talk down to, or raise your voice to people who have developmental disabilities. Gauge the pace, complexity, and vocabulary of your speech according to theirs.
- Remember that the person is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make his/her own decisions.
- People with some developmental disabilities, such as Down's Syndrome, may be anxious to please or use inappropriate words. Questions should be phrased in a neutral way to elicit accurate information. Verify responses by repeating each question in a different way. Do not react to words or language that may be inappropriate or that you do not understand. Treat each person with respect and as an individual.
- It can be difficult for people with developmental disabilities to make quick decisions. Be patient and allow the person to take their time.
- Clear signage with pictograms can help a person who has development disabilities to find his/her way around a facility.
- People with developmental disabilities often rely on routine and on the familiar to manage work and daily living. Be aware that a change in the environment or in a routine may require some attention and a period of adjustment.

## **People with Learning Disabilities**

Learning disabilities are lifelong disorders that interfere with a person's ability to receive, express or process information. Although they have certain limitations, most people with learning disabilities have average or above-average intelligence. You may not realize that the person has a learning disability because he/she functions so well. Or you may be confused about why such a high-functioning person has specific difficulties.

- People with Dyslexia or other reading disabilities have trouble reading written information. Give them verbal explanations and allow extra time for reading.
- Don't be surprised if you tell someone very simple instructions and he/she requests that you write them down. Because spoken information gets "scrambled" as he/she listens, a person who has a learning disability such as an auditory processing disorder may need information demonstrated or in writing.
- Ask the person how you can best relay information. Be direct in your communication.
- Do not talk down to an individual with learning or literacy issues or draw unnecessary attention to his/her needs or requests.
- It may be easier for the person to function in a quiet environment without distractions, such as a radio playing, people moving around or loud conversations.

## **People with Traumatic (or Acquired) Brain Injury**

People with traumatic brain injury have had damage to the brain, usually as a result of trauma, such as an accident or stroke.

- Some of the factors that affect persons with learning disabilities also apply to persons with traumatic brain injury. People with brain injury may have a loss of muscle control or mobility that is not obvious. For example, a person may not be able to sign his/her name, even though he/she can move his/her hand.
- A person with a brain injury may have poor impulse control. The person may make inappropriate comments and may not understand social cues or pick up on indications that he/she has offended someone. These behaviours can arise as a result of the injury.
- A person with a brain injury may be unable to follow directions due to poor short-term memory or poor directional orientation. He/she may ask to be accompanied, or he/she may use a guide dog for orientation, although he/she does not appear to be mobility impaired.
- If you are not sure that the person understands you, ask if he/she would like you to write down what you were saying.
- The person may have trouble concentrating or organizing his/her thoughts, especially in an over-stimulating environment, like a crowded

movie theatre or transportation terminal. Be patient. You might suggest going somewhere with fewer distractions.

## **Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) and Respiratory Disabilities**

People with MCS and respiratory disabilities such as Asthma or Emphysema react to toxins in the air. Stale air, fumes from cleaning products, perfume, carpeting, air freshener or even the fumes from magic markers can trigger a severe reaction.

- Try to avoid spray-cleaning tables, windows or other surfaces while people are in your place of business. If you must use a spray product, spray or pour it closely into the cloth, not into the air. Use less-toxic products whenever possible. Request that staff that have contact with the public use fragranced products like cologne, hair spray, hand lotion, and after-shave sparingly.
- Maintaining good ventilation and overall good indoor air quality will not only benefit your customers who have MCS and respiratory disabilities, it will also help you and all of your employees stay healthier and more alert.
- Second-hand smoke can be particularly harmful to people with MCS or respiratory disabilities. Follow and enforce no-smoking regulations, including in restrooms and stairwells. Discourage smokers from congregating at the entrance of your building and designate a separate smoking area away from the entrance.

## Table of Accommodations for Access

Building	Accessibility Features	Location on Premises	Special Operating Requirements
Library Main Branch	Parking spots Elevator Door opening Ramp (steep) Counters	2 spots Central in building Front lower level Front	
Town Hall	Ramp Lift Washrooms (2) Sound System  Service animals	North side to front door Inside front door Top of stairs Council Chambers  Allowed all public areas	Prompt snow clearing winter Trained employee to operate  Instructions on mix Committee Room
South Fred. Hall	Washrooms Level entrances Sound System Service animals	Off of main entrance Inside front door Behind bar Allowed all public areas	
South Fred. Library	Level entrances Washrooms Counters	Inside main entrance	
North Fred. Ball Diamond	Ramp for elevated seating	Diamond 1 (south)	Gravel area to cross to access
Fairgrounds Ball Diamond	Washrooms		Gravel area to cross to access
Commercial Court Infrastructure Offices	Door opener Washrooms Service Animals	Front entrance Allowed all public areas	
Selby Hall	Ramp Washrooms Sound system Service animals	Front entrance Inside main entrance Behind bar Allowed all public areas	
SPC	Door opener Elevator Ramp Sound system Service animals	Main entrance Main lobby Office Area Allowed in all public areas	
Fire Hall Napanee	Level entrance Special Needs Database		Community effort to update data
Fire Hall Dorland	Level entrance Washrooms	Inside Maintenance	
12 Market Square (Building Dept)	Washrooms Ramp	At back of main floor East side of building	
Springside Park	Paved walkways		