

Customer Service Guide

In 2005, Ontario passed into law the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

Businesses and organizations that provide goods and services, will have to meet accessibility standards with the goal of making Ontario fully accessible by 2025.

The Customer Service Standard outlines what businesses in Ontario must do to make the provision of their goods and services more accessible to people with disabilities.

With this in mind, this guide will provide you with some helpful tips, strategies and resources.



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A. GENERAL TIPS

Some of the best tips for supporting students with disabilities are the simplest:

- Ask “May I help you?”
- Speak directly to the student
- Take the time to understand their needs
- Don’t make assumptions
- Above all... be patient

If you notice a person is having difficulty accessing your goods or services, a good starting point is to simply ask how you can best help. Be patient—and remember your customers are your best source of information about their needs. The solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

B. HOW TO RECOGNIZE AND RESPOND TO STUDENTS WHO HAVE SPECIFIC DISABILITIES

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Recognize

- People with hearing loss may be deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing.
- People with hearing loss may use assistive devices including hearing aids, alternate text telephone systems such as TTYs and text net, sign language interpreters, various amplifiers, or a pen and paper.

Respond

- Attract the student’s attention before speaking by a gentle touch on the shoulder, a subtle wave of your hand, or tap on the desk.
- When addressing a student who is deaf or hard of hearing, make sure they can clearly see your face.
- Never shout to try to make yourself understood.
- If a student uses a hearing aid, try to reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper)

For more information: <http://www.chs.ca/>



Deafblind

Recognize

- A student who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some degree.
- The student may not necessarily be completely deaf and blind. Individuals who are deafblind may have some residual vision and/or hearing.

Respond

- Speak directly to the student and not to their support person.
- A student who is deafblind will explain to you how to communicate with them.
- People who are deafblind may be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating. Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach
- A customer who is deaf/blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate to them, perhaps with an assistance card or note.

For more information: <http://www.cdbraontario.ca/>

Intellectual/Developmental

Recognize

- Developmental or intellectual disabilities, ranging from mild to profound, can limit a student's ability to learn, communicate, perform everyday activities, and live independently.
- It may be difficult to recognize someone who has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way the person asks questions, or uses body language.

Respond

- Use plain language and make sure the person understands what you've said. You can be direct and ask: "Do you understand this?"
- Provide one piece of information at a time. Break down the information into simpler concepts but avoid exaggerated speech or gestures.

For more information: <http://www.oadd.org/>



Physical/Mobility

Recognize

- A wide range of disabilities that restrict body movement to varying degrees.
- Physical disabilities may require people to use wheelchairs, walkers, canes, or other assistive devices.

Respond

- Consider the physical access of your classroom. Make sure there are no items that would be in the way of a person who uses a wheelchair or walker.
- Respect the person's personal space. Don't lean over them or on an assistive device. When speaking to a person in a wheelchair for more than a minute, sit or crouch down to their eye level.
- Never move devices such as canes or walkers, out of the person's reach.
- If you are assisting a person in a wheelchair, make sure they are ready to be moved and describe what you are going to do before moving them
- If you plan out of class activities provide advance notice so transportation can be arranged. Ensure the location of your class activity is accessible.

Other Disabilities

Recognize

- Other disabilities which may be temporary or permanent, visible or non-visible include fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, arthritis, kidney disease, allergies, cardiovascular problems, cancer, diabetes, HIV infections and seizure disorders.
- Students with these disabilities may occasionally be absent due to the effects of medication, fatigue, and pain.

Respond

- Make sure equipment and supplies are close to the person.
- Provide access to a note taker. Allow break periods for rest and taking medication
- Provide alternative methods of evaluation and allowances for absences for medical reasons such as rescheduling of tests or exams.



Learning

Recognize

- A variety of disabilities that affect how a person processes information.
- Learning disabilities can be associated with language-based learning, mathematics, or fine motor skills.



- The person may have difficulty reading material or processing information.

Respond

- Take your time – people with learning disabilities may require more time to process what you have said and to respond.
- Provide information in a way that best suits the student. Even using a pen and paper may help them review and absorb the information. Explain the information clearly and be prepared to repeat it.

For more information: <http://www.ldac-taac.ca/>
<http://www.ldao.ca/>

Mental Health

Recognize

- Includes several disabilities ranging widely in severity, including; anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder.
- Non-visible disabilities can be difficult to understand.

Respond

- Try to help the student reduce their stress levels. A student may choose to take fewer courses each semester (a reduced course load) in order to reduce stress. Remember, not all disabilities are visible.
- Reassure students that you are there to support their learning.

For more information: <http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/>

Speech/Language

Recognize

- Difficulty in communicating verbally such as word-finding difficulties or stuttering.
- A person with a severe speech or language disability may use a communication board or other assistive device.

Respond

- Be patient. Give the student the time they need to get their point across.
- If possible, ask questions that can be answered with a “yes” or “no”.

Vision Loss

Recognize

- Don't assume students with this disability are blind. While most individuals with this disability have some residual vision, they may have trouble reading signs, locating landmarks, or seeing hazards.
- Some students may use a guide dog or white cane while others may simply need to use a magnifier to view written materials.

Respond

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Make written materials available in large print if required. Offer to read material out loud to them.
- In a new classroom, guide them to a desk or a comfortable location and don't walk away without saying good-bye.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person and wait for permission before starting to move. If they accept, walk slowly.
- Identify landmarks or other details to help orient your student.



For more information: <http://www.cnib.ca/>

C. HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY INTERACT WITH

People who use assistive devices

Personal Assistive Devices include:

- Wheelchair, walker, cane
 - Hearing aid, amplification device
 - Keyboard and pointing device
 - Screen readers
 - Digital recorders
- Personal assistive devices are part of the personal space of the people using them.
 - Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
 - Let your customer know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g. TTY device, accessible washrooms, etc).

People who require the assistance of a guide dog or other service animal

- Service animals are working animals. So, it's best not to touch, call, or make eye contact with them to avoid distracting them from their job.
- Service animals are allowed into public places where their owner goes including restaurants, elevators, and offices.
- The owner of the service animal is responsible for the supervision of the animal at all times.

For more information: <http://www.guidedogs.ca/>
<http://www.dogguides.com/>



People who require the assistance of a support person

- Support persons can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member, or a friend who assists with communications, mobility, personal care, or medical needs
- Always speak directly to the student with a disability
- A support person normally accompanies a student with a disability anywhere they go
- When discussing confidential matters, confirm with the student whether they want the support person to be present.

For more information on the Services Conestoga College offers, go to:
<http://www.conestogac.on.ca/disabilitysvc/>

For more information on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, or the accessible customer service standard, visit www.accessON.ca

For more information on disabilities and services in Ontario:
<http://www.ontario.ca/en/communities/disabilities/index.htm>
<http://www.cwdo.org/>