



AODA & SERVE-ABILITY TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS

Contents

Accessibility Standards for Customer Service
(From Ontario.ca/AccessOn)

Page 1

Appendix:

Tips for Guiding a Customer who has Vision Loss

Page 8

Instructions on Helping Someone with an Assistive Device

Page 9

(From Resources Section of the e-course: Serve-Ability:
Transforming Ontario's Customer Service")

Accessibility Standard for Customer Service: Training tips for employees & volunteers

Introduction

Ontario's new accessibility standard aims to give people with disabilities the same great customer service.

This guide will help you do that.

It will help you learn about:

- The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service and how it will help you welcome customers with disabilities
- How to serve customers with different kinds of disabilities
- How to help customers who use assistive devices, like wheelchairs or oxygen tanks
- Service animals, such as guide dogs, and how to welcome customers who use them
- What a support person does and how to help customers who are accompanied by a support person
- What to do when a customer with a disability needs help accessing your goods and services.

2. What you need to do under the standard

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) was passed in 2005.

Under the Act, the Ontario government is putting accessibility standards in place in the following areas:

- Customer service
- Employment
- Information and communications
- Transportation
- Built environment.

The Accessibility Standard for Customer Service applies to all people or organizations in Ontario that provide goods or services, and have one more employees.

It affects private, non-profit and public sectors:

- Private
- Non-profit
- Public

To provide accessible customer service, organizations need to:

- Create and put in place an accessibility plan that:
 - Considers a person's disability when communicating with them
 - Allows assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, oxygen tanks, etc.
 - Allows service animals
 - Welcomes support persons
 - Informs customers when accessible services aren't available
 - Invites customers to provide feedback
- Train staff on accessible customer service
- Put their plan in writing
 - Let customers know how to find their plan (e.g., on their website)
 - Offer their plan in accessible formats, like large print, if requested
- Report their progress online

3. How to communicate with people with different types of disabilities

There are many types and degrees of disability. Openly communicating and responding to your customers' needs is the key to excellent customer service for all. If you're not sure about the best approach, just ask a person with a disability how you can best communicate with them.

Here are a few tips for interacting with people who have various disabilities:

People with physical disabilities

Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury may use crutches while someone with severe arthritis or a heart condition may have difficulty walking longer distances.

Tips:

- 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.
- Don't touch items or equipment, such as canes or wheelchairs, 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.

People with vision loss

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

Tips:

- When you know someone has vision loss, don't assume the individual can't see you. Many people who have low vision still have some sight.
- Identify yourself when you approach and speak directly to the customer.
- Ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (for example, a menu or schedule of fees).
- When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.

People who have hearing loss

People who have hearing loss may be Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. They may also be oral deaf – unable to hear, but prefer to talk instead of using sign language. These terms are used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

Tips:

- Once a customer has identified themselves as having hearing loss, make sure you are in a well-lit area where they can see your face and read your lips.
- As needed, attract the customer's attention before speaking. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- If your customer uses a hearing aid, 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).

People who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps with communication.

Tips:

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

People with speech or language impairments

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

Tips:

- Don't assume that a person with speech impairment also has another disability.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or a "no".
- Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences.

People who have learning disabilities

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

Tips:

- Be patient – people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond.
- Try to provide information in a way that takes into account the customer's disability. For example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math.

People who have intellectual developmental disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

Tips:

- Don't make assumptions about what a person can do.
- Use plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.

People who have mental health disabilities

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorder.

- If you sense or know that a customer has a mental health disability be sure to treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident, calm and reassuring.
- If a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

4. How to interact with people who use assistive devices, and how to use any equipment that your organization provides to help customers with disabilities

An assistive device is a tool, technology or other mechanism that enables a person with a disability to do everyday tasks and activities, such as moving, communicating or lifting. Personal assistive devices can include things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes or speech amplification devices.

Tips:

- Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission.
- Don't move assistive devices or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of your customer's reach.
- Let your customers know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g. public phones with TTY service, accessible washrooms, etc.).

If your organization offers any equipment or devices for customers with disabilities, make sure you know how to use them. It could be helpful to have instruction manuals handy or an instruction sheet posted where the device is located or stored.

Some examples of assistive devices that your organization might offer include:

- Lifts, which raises or lowers people who use mobility devices
- Accessible interactive kiosk, which might offer information or services in Braille or through audio headsets
- Wheelchairs

5. How to interact with a person who has a service animal a guide dog or other service animal

People with vision loss may use a guide dog, but there are other types of service animals as well. Hearing alert animals help people who are deaf, deafened, oral deaf, or hard of hearing. Other service animals are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

Under the standard, service animals must be allowed on the parts of your premises that are open to the public. In some instances, service animals will not be permitted in certain areas by law (for example, a restaurant kitchen).

Tips:

- Remember that a service animal is not a pet. Avoid touching or addressing them.
 - If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.
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6. How to serve a person accompanied by a support person

Some people with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person, such as an intervenor. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help your customer with a variety of things from communicating, to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.

Welcome support people to your workplace or business. They are permitted in any part of your premises that is open to the public. If your organization is one that charges admission, such as a movie theatre or bowling alley, provide notice, in advance, about what admission fee will be charged for a support person.

Tips:

- If you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services, or simply ask.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their support person.

7. How to assist people with disabilities who need help accessing your goods or services

If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your goods or services, a good starting point is to simply ask “How can I help you?”

Your customers are your best source for information about their needs. A solution can be simple and they will likely appreciate your attention and consideration.

Learn More

You can get more information on anything related to accessibility at ontario.ca/AccessON.

This document is available in an alternate format on request.

ISBN 978-1-4435-8260-5

Tips for Guiding a Customer who has Vision Loss

The following are instructions and tips on guiding a customer with vision loss. For more information about guiding someone with vision loss visit www.cnib.ca

- Ask first if your customer wishes to be guided.
- If the answer is “yes”, offer your arm. Ask which arm is better. Walk at a normal pace. The person will walk about a step behind. Announce handrails, doors (to the right/left, push/pull to open etc.) and describe the surrounding areas (such as what is in an aisle – shelves and sections).
- If you are guiding towards stairs:
 - Let the customer know if they have to walk up or down;
 - Approach the stairs head on, not at an angle and come to a full stop in front of the stairs;
 - Lead or guide your customer to the rail side to allow them to take hold of it;
 - Let them find the first step and then start to climb or descend the stairs;
 - Try to be one step ahead and announce the last step.
- If you are going through a narrow doorway, passage etc., the guide goes first, after explaining the circumstances and describing the area.
- Upon entering a room, offer to describe the dimensions and the location of people and furniture.
- If the person wishes to sit, offer to guide him/her and place his/her hand on the back of the chair.
- Keep the person informed when others approach or leave.
- If you must leave the individual alone, do not leave him or her standing in the middle of the room, with nothing to hold onto. If he/she is not seated, guide him/her to a door, wall, or piece of furniture to stand next to. This will help the person to stay spatially oriented.
- If your customer is accompanied by a guide dog, stand to the right of your customer, as the guide dog is usually at the owner’s left side. When guiding a customer with a dog, offer your left arm, but if the person you are guiding prefers to hold your right arm, that’s okay too.
- When the customer has a guide dog, offer to open the door first, before doing so. The customer may be using the door’s location as a reference point, or he/she may prefer to do it without assistance to protect the dog’s paws.

“Tips for guiding a Customer who has Vision Loss” is part of the course “Serve-Ability: Transforming Ontario’s Customer Service”. The End User Agreement and copyright rules apply to any documents, resources, and materials that form part of the course. See the End User Agreement for more information.



Instructions on Helping Someone with an Assistive Device

Many of your customers with disabilities will have their own personal assistive devices. Don't touch or handle an assistive device without permission.

Examples of personal assistive devices:

- wheelchairs,
- scooters
- walker
- amplification devices that boost sound for listeners who are hard-of-hearing without reducing background noise
- hearing aids
- oxygen tanks
- electronic notebooks or laptop computers
- personal data managers
- communication boards used to communicate using symbols, words or pictures
- speech-generating devices that "speak" when a symbol, word or picture is pressed

Moving personal assistive devices

If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair remember to:

- wait for and follow the person's instructions;
- confirm that your customer is ready to move;
- describe what you are going to do before you do it;
- avoid uneven ground and objects that create bumpy and unsafe ride; and
- practice consideration and safety – don't leave the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

Do not move items or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of your customer's reach.

Respect your customer's personal space. Do not lean over them or on their assistive device.

Let your customer know about accessible features in the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

