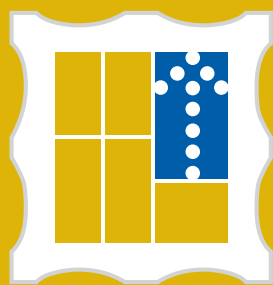




# Tips on Serving Customers with Disabilities.



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**Ontario**

# How to Welcome Customers with Disabilities.

Did you know that just over 15.5% of Ontarians have a disability?



That's 1 in every 7 Ontarians and as the population ages that number will grow.

People with disabilities, along with their families and friends, travel, shop, do business, engage in activities in the community, send their children to the local school and attend school events, just like everyone else. By providing service that welcomes people with disabilities, you can offer better service to everyone.

Treating all the people who come to our schools and board offices with individual respect and courtesy is at the heart of excellent customer service.

Here are some ways you can provide better service to your customers with disabilities:

- Treat people with disabilities with respect and consideration.
- Patience, optimism, and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Smile, relax, and keep in mind that people with disabilities want to experience helpful customer service.
- Don't make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has.
- Some disabilities are not visible. Take the time to get to know your customers' needs.
- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "How May I help you?"
- If you can't understand what someone is saying, just politely ask again.
- Ask before you offer to help — don't just jump in. Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Find a good way to communicate. A good start is to listen carefully.
- Look at your customer, but don't stare. Speak directly to a person with a disability, not to their interpreter or someone who is with them.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Ask permission before touching a wheelchair or a piece of equipment.
- Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

# Understanding Disabilities

There are many kinds of disabilities. They can be visible, hidden, permanent or occur only at certain times. Here are some types of disabilities:

- deaf-blind
- hearing
- intellectual
- developmental
- learning
- mental health
- physical
- speech or language
- vision

Disabilities vary. Being hard of hearing is different from being Deaf. Having low vision is different from being legally blind. A disability can happen to anyone at anytime. Some people are born with a disability. For others, the disability results from an illness or an accident. Sometimes it happens because the person is getting older. In fact, as our population ages, many of us may eventually face some kind of limitation. According to Statistics Canada, by 2031, seniors will account for between 23% and 25% of the total population. That's double the current senior proportion of 13%.

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## Deaf-Blind Disabilities

A person who is deaf-blind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating. Intervenors 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.



Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf-blind:



- Don't 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.
- Speak directly to your customer as you normally would, not to the intervenor.
- Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer who is deaf-blind.
- Don't touch or address 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.

# Hearing Impairments

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hearing impaired may require assistive devices when communicating. They may also use e-mail, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.



Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf or hard of hearing:



- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where your customer can see your face.
- Look at and speak directly to your customer. Address your customer, not their interpreter.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- Don't put your hands in front of your face when speaking.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf may be different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

# Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things 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.

Customers with an intellectual or developmental disability may understand more than you think. They will appreciate the respect and consideration that you show them.



### Here are some tips on serving customers who have an intellectual or developmental disability:



- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Make sure your customer understands what you've said.
- If you can't understand what's being said, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Be supportive and patient.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or attendant.

## Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities can result in a host of different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or they can be more pronounced. They can interfere with a person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has a learning disability unless you are told, or notice the way a person acts, asks questions or uses body language.



### Here are some tips on serving customers who have learning disabilities:



- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to your customer.
- Take some time — people with some kinds of learning disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Be courteous and patient and your customer will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

# Mental Health Disabilities

It is possible that you will not recognize a person with a mental health disability unless you are informed of it. Therefore, usually, it will not affect customer service at all.

But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let your customer tell you how you can best help.



Here are some tips on serving customers who have mental health disabilities:



- Treat a person with a mental health disability with respect and consideration.
- Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with your customer to meet their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

# Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations may also have difficulty with moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.



Here are some tips on serving customers who have physical disabilities:



- Speak normally and directly to your customer. Don't speak to someone who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Be patient. Customers will identify their needs to you.
- Don't touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, unnecessarily unless it's an emergency.
- Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).
- Remove obstacles and rearrange furniture to ensure clear passage.





## Speech or Language Impairments

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.



Here are some tips on serving customers with speech or language impairments:



- Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a customer has difficulty speaking; don't assume they have an intellectual or developmental disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask your customer to repeat the information.
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.
- Be patient and polite, and give your customer whatever time he/she needs to get his/her point across.
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences. Wait for them to finish.
- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

# Vision Disabilities

Vision disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Some 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.

Impaired vision can restrict a person's ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision disability. Others may use a guide dog or a white cane.



Here are some tips on serving customers who have vision disabilities:



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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.</li><li>• Speak normally and clearly.</li><li>• Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it's an emergency.</li><li>• If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.</li><li>• Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.</li><li>• Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.</li><li>• If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Don't just assume the individual can't see you.</li><li>• Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.</li><li>• Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around them.</li><li>• Don't walk away without saying good-bye.</li><li>• Be patient. Things may take a little longer.</li></ul> |
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# Disabilities: Myths and Realities

People without disabilities often don't understand what it is like to live with a disability and the barriers that people with disabilities face on a daily basis.

Here are some of the common myths about people with disabilities and the reality.



## MYTH

People with disabilities are inferior to “normal” people and their lives are very different.

We need to feel sorry for people with disabilities.

People with disabilities are brave and courageous.

It's not a good idea to hire people with disabilities. They have a higher turnover rate and they take sick days more often.

You have to be careful when you're talking to a person with a disability, because they are easily offended if you use the wrong word.

It's difficult serving customers with disabilities.



## REALITY

What is “normal?” We all have different abilities, talents, interests and personalities. You name it! People with disabilities go to school, get married, work, have families, play, do laundry, go shopping, eat out, travel, volunteer, vote, pay taxes, laugh, cry, plan and dream — just like everyone else.

That’s patronizing. People with disabilities don’t need pity. They need access to opportunities.

Adjusting to a disability requires adapting to a lifestyle, not bravery and courage.

Many studies show that employees with disabilities are often more productive, dependable and loyal than their co-workers without disabilities and that staff retention is 72% higher among persons with disabilities. That adds up to savings of millions of dollars every year in hiring and training costs.

The experiences of large corporations such as DuPont and the Royal Bank of Canada show that when business hires people with disabilities:

- the pool of potential employees becomes larger
- staff retention rates increase
- absenteeism decreases

You just need to be as polite and respectful as you would when speaking to anyone. If you’re not sure what to say or do, it’s okay to ask.

Customers with disabilities have the same preferences, perceptions, attitudes, habits, and needs as customers without disabilities, and they are looking for the same quality of products and services.

Everyone, regardless of ability, deserves to be treated with the same dignity and respect.



## Talking about Disabilities: Choosing the Right Words

Words can influence and reinforce perceptions of people with disabilities. They can create either a positive view of people with disabilities or an indifferent, negative description.



Here are some tips that can help make your communication with or about people with disabilities more successful:



- Use “disability” not “handicap.”
- Put people first. “Person with a disability” puts the focus on the person instead of their disability.
- For specific disabilities, say “person with epilepsy” or “person who uses a wheelchair.”
- Avoid statements that make it seem like a person with a disability should be pitied such as “victim of,” “suffers with,” or “stricken with” a particular illness or disability.

If you’re not familiar with the disability, wait until the individual describes their situation to you, instead of making assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.

The following preferred words and phrases will help you choose language that is neither demeaning nor hurtful:

INSTEAD OF	PLEASE USE
Aged (the), the elderly	Seniors
Autistic	A person with Autism A person with Autism spectrum Disorder
Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity	A person who has a congenital disability A person with a disability since birth
Blind (the), visually impaired (the)	A person with vision loss A person who is blind A person with low vision
Brain damaged	A person with a brain injury A person with an acquired brain injury
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	A person who uses a wheelchair
Crazy, insane, lunatic, psycho, mental, mental patient, maniac, neurotic, psychotic, unsound mind, schizophrenic	A person with a mental illness A person with a mental disorder A person with a mood disorder (for example, a person with depression, a person with bipolar disorder) A person with a personality disorder (for example, a person with antisocial personality disorder) A person with an anxiety disorder (for example a person with obsessive-compulsive disorder) A person with an eating disorder (for example a person with anorexia nervosa, a person with bulimia) A person with schizophrenia
Cripple, crippled, lame, physically challenged	A person with a disability A person with a physical disability A person with a spinal cord injury A person who uses a walker A person who uses a mobility aid A person with arthritis

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INSTEAD OF	PLEASE USE
Deaf (the), hearing impaired (the)	<p>A person who is deaf (for example, a person with profound hearing loss)</p> <p>A person who is deafened (for example, a person who has become deaf later in life)</p> <p>A person who is hard of hearing (for example, a person with hearing loss)</p> <p>When referring to the deaf community and their culture (whose preferred mode of communication is sign language) it is acceptable to use "the Deaf"</p>
Deaf and dumb, deaf mute	A person who is deaf
Deaf-Blind (the)	A person who is deaf-blind (for example, a person who has any combination of vision and hearing loss)
Epileptic	A person who has epilepsy
Fits, spells, attacks	Seizures
Handicapped (the), invalid, patient, the disabled	A person with a disability
Hidden disability, invisible disability	Non-visible disability
Learning disabled, learning disordered, dyslexic	A person with a learning disability or people with learning disabilities
Mentally retarded, idiot, simple, retarded, feeble minded, imbecile	<p>A person with an intellectual disability</p> <p>A person with a developmental disability</p>
Midget, Dwarf	<p>A little person</p> <p>A person of short stature</p> <p>A person who has a form of dwarfism</p>
Mongoloid, Mongolism, Downs	<p>A person with Down Syndrome</p> <p>A person with an intellectual or developmental disability</p>
Normal	<p>A person without a disability</p> <p>A person who is not disabled</p> <p>Specifically, a person who is sighted, a hearing person, a person who is ambulatory</p>
Spastic	A person who has muscle spasms
Stutterer	<p>A person who stutters</p> <p>A person with a communication disorder</p>





## Understanding Barriers

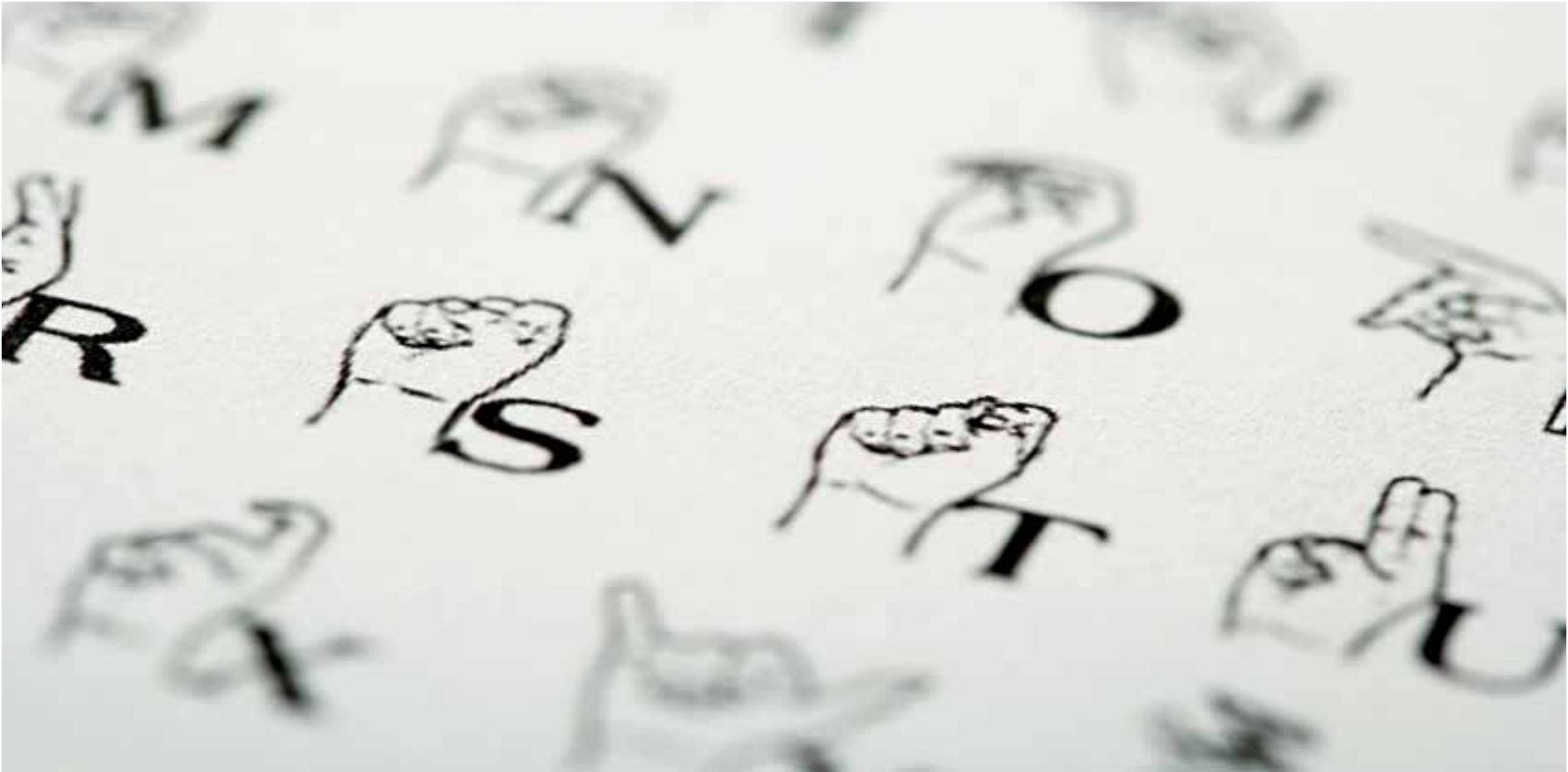
Barriers are obstacles – things that stand in the way of people with disabilities doing many of the day-to-day activities that most of us take for granted. Barriers make shopping, working, going to a movie or taking public transit difficult, sometimes impossible, for people with disabilities.

There are many kinds of barriers:

### Architectural and Physical Barriers

These are features of buildings or spaces that cause problems for people with disabilities. Examples are:

- hallways and doorways that are too narrow for a person using a wheelchair, electric scooter or walker
- counters that are too high for a person of short stature
- poor lighting for people with low vision
- doorknobs that are difficult for people with arthritis to grasp
- parking spaces that are too narrow for a driver who uses a wheelchair
- telephones that are not equipped with telecommunications devices for people who are Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing



## Information or Communications Barriers

These happen when a person can't easily understand information.

Examples are:

- print is too small to read
- websites that don't support screen-reading software
- signs that are not clear or easily understood

## Attitudinal Barriers

These are barriers that discriminate against people with disabilities.

Examples are:

- thinking that people with disabilities are inferior
- assuming that a person who has a speech impairment can't understand you

## Technology Barriers

These barriers occur when a technology can't be modified to support various assistive devices. An example is:

- a website that doesn't support screen-reading software

## Systemic Barriers

These barriers occur when an organization's policies, practices or procedures discriminate against people with disabilities. An example is:

- a hiring process that is not open to people with disabilities

# What You Need to Know when Dealing with Customers with Disabilities Over the Phone



Here are some tips on serving customers with disabilities on the phone:



- Speak normally, clearly and directly.
- Don't worry about how their voice sounds. Concentrate on what's being said.
- Be patient, don't interrupt and don't finish your customer's sentences. Give your customer time to explain him/herself.
- Don't try to guess what your customer is saying. If you don't understand, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- If you're not certain what was said, just repeat or rephrase what you've heard.
- If a telephone customer is using an interpreter or a TTY line, just speak normally to the customer, not to the interpreter.
- If your customer has great difficulty communicating, make arrangements to call back when it's convenient to speak with someone else who can be of help.

The content of this booklet is courtesy of: [www.accesson.ca](http://www.accesson.ca)

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