

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
Training Program

Customer Service Standard



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Module 2: Customer Service

Customer Service Standard

Welcome to Customer Service Standard!

Introduction



Customer service representative: “I want to be able to help everyone. It’s just that... sometimes, I’m not sure how. The other day, someone came to the service counter, and when I asked her “How can I help you?”, she pointed at her ear and shook her head. I realized she was telling me that she was deaf, but I didn’t know how to communicate with her! What can I do next time to help her?”

Narrator: Welcome to the City of Burlington Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Training Program. This module will provide you with an overview of the Customer Service Standard of the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. You will learn basic etiquette for interacting with people with disabilities, and how to accommodate their needs while continuing to provide a high level of customer service.



Accessibility Legislation in Ontario

Under the Customer Service Standard, the City of Burlington must meet the following requirements. We will:

- Create accessible customer service policies and notify the public that such policies are available
- Consider a person's disability when communicating with them
- Welcome people who use assistive devices, service animals, and support persons
- Inform the public when accessible facilities or services are temporarily unavailable
- Invite customers to provide feedback, and
- Train our staff and volunteers and keep a record of the training



People who must be trained on the Customer Service Standard at the City of Burlington include all city employees and volunteers, anyone who develops city policies and anyone who provides goods, services or facilities to customers on the city's behalf



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Barriers to Accessibility

A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of life because of their disability. Some barriers are obvious; for example, a building with multiple floors and no elevator. But there are many barriers that are hard to see and more difficult to understand and easier for people to overlook.

Select each of the symbols to learn about barriers to accessibility.



A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of life because of their disability



Architectural or structural barriers

Architectural or structural barriers may result from design elements of a building such as stairs, doorways, the width of hallways and even room layout. These barriers may also occur through everyday practices, such as when we store boxes or other objects in hallways, obstructing the accessible path of travel. This is the type of barrier that you may already be familiar with; for example, a building entrance with no ramp.



Information and communication barriers

Information and communication barriers can make it difficult for people to receive or convey information. For example, a person who is deaf cannot communicate using a standard phone. Everyday obstacles in communication materials such as small font size, low colour contrast between text and background, confusing design and the use of language that isn't clear or easy to understand can all cause information and communication barriers.



Technological barriers

Technology, or lack of it, can prevent people from accessing information. Everyday tools like computers, telephones and other aids can all present barriers if they are not set up or designed with accessibility in mind.



Attitude barriers

Attitude is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome, because it's hard to change the way people think or behave. Some people don't know how to communicate with people who have visible or invisible disabilities. For example, assuming someone with a speech disorder has an intellectual disability and speaking to them as if they were a child, or forming ideas about the person because of pre-existing stereotypes. Some people may feel that they could offend the individual with a disability by offering help, or they ignore or avoid people with disabilities altogether. Remember, attitude is a major barrier that's within your power to change.



Systemic barriers

Systemic barriers can result from an organization's policies, practices and procedures if they restrict people with disabilities, often unintentionally. For example, a hiring process that only permits applicants to submit their resume through an online application system, with no alternative process in place if the



applicant cannot use the system.

Serving People with Disabilities



Accessible customer service is about not making assumptions, it's about understanding different needs and being inclusive. To serve people with disabilities properly and treat them with respect, it's important that you use the right language. Using positive and appropriate terms can empower people; likewise, using inappropriate words can perpetuate negative stereotypes. Individuals with disabilities are people first. They are unique individuals, like everyone, who also happen to live with a disability.

The table on your screen shows a list of the right and wrong words to use when talking about people with disabilities. Can you remember a time when you may have used one of the wrong terms in the right-hand column? Read over the terms and commit them to memory.

In the Resources tab, you will find a PDF with these terms and you will also find a list of tips for providing at-home service to people with disabilities, as well as over-the-phone service. You'll also find a link to a YouTube video that discusses the importance of providing accessible customer service.

Disabilities Addressed in the Code and the AODA

Here is a list of disabilities addressed in the Code and the AODA. While this list is intended to cover as many individuals as possible, it does not represent every person's experience. Everyone who lives with a disability is unique, including different levels of severity, a combination of one or more disabilities and different experiences living with their disability.



“ Everyone who lives with a disability is unique, including different levels of severity, a combination of one or more disabilities and different experiences living with their disability ”

In the following slides, you will learn some tips about how to serve people with disabilities. The tips are meant to guide you; if in doubt, the best thing to do is to ask the person “how can I help?”

Physical Disabilities



There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all of them require the use of mobility aids like wheelchairs, scooters, crutches or canes. People who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputations may also have difficulty with stamina, moving, standing, sitting or the ability to reach or grasp. It may be difficult to identify a person with an invisible physical disability.

When serving someone with a physical disability, ask before you help. Speak directly to the person and offer your assistance, but don't insist on it. Avoid touching any assistive devices unnecessarily and do not move items or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of the person's reach. If a counter top is too high or wide to interact comfortably with the person, step from behind it to provide service. If you are having a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so that you are at eye level. Be prepared to provide information about accessible features available at the location.



Blindness and Vision Loss

There are varying degrees of vision loss and a distinction between blindness and low vision. Most people living with vision loss have some degree of limited vision. Very few people are fully blind. Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read printed words or signs, recognize faces, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some may use a white cane or guide dog to help with orientation and movement, while others may not.



When serving someone with blindness or vision loss, don't assume that they can't see you. Identify yourself when you approach them, and don't leave without saying goodbye. Always speak directly to the person, and if you offer help, wait until the offer is accepted or declined. Give clear directions; for example, "the door is behind you on your left" or "the cup is on the counter in front of your right hand". Offer your elbow to provide sighted guide if needed, and identify obstacles before you come to them. Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog from doing its job. You'll learn more about service animals later in the module.



Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog from doing its job



Deafness and Hearing Loss

Like blindness and low vision, hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing individuals may use hearing aids, cochlear implants, sign language and/or other assistive-listening and communication devices. Smart phones and text messaging can provide instant communication



for people with hearing loss.

When serving someone with hearing loss, attract their attention before you speak, using eye contact and a simple wave to connect visually. Make sure you are in a well-lit area where they can see your face and read your lips. If the person uses a hearing aid, try to reduce background noise, or move to a quieter location if possible. Do not cover or have anything in your mouth when speaking. Always speak directly to your customer, not to their interpreter, asking one question at a time. Speak naturally, with a normal expression and at a normal pace. If you are writing back and forth to communicate, keep your sentences short. If you are in a group setting, talk one at a time to avoid confusion.



Deafblindness

A person who is deafblind has some degree of both vision and hearing loss. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communication

When serving someone with deafblindness, don't assume what they can or cannot do. People who are deafblind have varying degrees of both hearing and vision loss, making service unique to each individual. A customer who is deafblind will likely explain to you how to best communicate with them or give



People who are deafblind have varying degrees of both hearing and vision loss, making service unique to each individual



you an assistance card or note explaining how to communicate. If they have an



intervenor, speak directly to the person with a disability, not to the intervenor. If possible, use an area with good lighting and reduced background noise when you are communicating. Use clear descriptions when giving directions or describing an object; if possible, let them touch the object itself to help them visualize it. Never leave without saying goodbye.

Speech or Language Disabilities

For many reasons, people with speech or language disabilities may have problems communicating. For example, they may have difficulties with verbal communication or voice strength because of a stroke, cerebral palsy or hearing loss. A speech or language disability often has no impact on a person's ability to understand. Some people may use communication boards or other assistive devices to help with communicating.



When serving someone with a speech or language disability, speak to them as you would anyone else, in your regular tone of voice and pace. Be patient - do not speak for the individual or complete their sentences. Let the person know if you do not understand what they are trying to say, and ask them to repeat the message, tell you in a different way or write it down. If you are able, ask yes-or-no questions that could be answered non-verbally. If the person is difficult to



understand, concentrate on content, not their voice. Give them time to fully explain themselves - don't interrupt. If they have a stammer, don't finish their words or sentences.

Intellectual Disabilities

An intellectual disability can be characterized by intellectual development and capacity that is significantly below average and involves a permanent limitation in a person's ability to learn or adapt to their environment. The effects of an intellectual disability can range from mild to profound. People with intellectual disabilities do not necessarily have a recognizable condition.



Don't make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Be supportive and patient, and be prepared to repeat and rephrase your sentences if necessary



When serving someone with an intellectual disability, use plain language and speak in short sentences, giving one piece of information at time. After you speak, make sure they understand what you've said. You may wish to ask them to repeat the message back to you in their own words. If you can't help them understand what's being said, don't pretend. Just ask your question in a different way. Don't make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Be supportive and patient, and be prepared to repeat and rephrase your sentences if necessary.

Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities range from mild to severe and may affect a person's ability to receive, process, remember or analyze information. Some learning disabilities can interfere with a person's ability to concentrate or focus. Other



learning disabilities can make it difficult for a person to read, write, spell or solve math problems. A learning disability does not mean a person cannot learn. It means that they learn in a different way.

When serving someone with a learning disability, ask them how to best accommodate their needs. Provide information in appropriate formats, and minimize distractions so that full attention is on communication. Keep sentences short and clear, use gestures or diagrams as needed and avoid complex words or jargon.

Mental Illness

People with mental illness look like anyone else. You may not know if someone has a mental illness, and it may not affect their customer service experience. But if someone is having trouble controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help. Be calm and professional and let them tell you how you can best help.



When serving someone with a mental illness, be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with them to meet their needs. Be respectful to the person, and do not judge. Use plain, clear language, and avoid complex ideas and jargon. Talk to the person as you would talk to anyone else and speak in your regular tone of voice, in a calm manner, and present one thought at a time. It can be helpful to repeat the statement using different words if you are not understood. Always pay attention to non-verbal cues.



Scenario: Difficult Client

Everyone who has worked in public or customer service has their share of stories to tell about difficult clients. You may not know the reason behind the customer's state of mind. Not every difficult customer service event involves a person with a disability, but it is possible that your difficult client may be living with a disability like mental illness.

Picture this scenario: someone has just walked into your service area, and is demanding that you deal with their problem immediately. You can see that they are physically and emotionally distressed. How should you respond?

Below are three potential responses.



Response 1: "Sir, I have to ask you to calm down! You are alarming the other customers!"

Speaking firmly to the client could potentially escalate the situation further. It's important to be calm, confident and reassuring when you are providing service to someone who may have a mental illness. Be respectful, listen to them and do not judge.

Response 2: "That's it, I'm out of here! They don't pay me enough to deal with this."

Leaving the situation can seem like the safest option for you, but it may not be the safest option for the client. It is your responsibility to make sure that they are safe. Do not leave a person alone in your work area unless you are in immediate physical danger.

Response 3: "I'm going to do everything I can to help you."

Listen patiently and speak in a reassuring tone. Use plain, clear language, and avoid complex ideas and jargon. If you suspect that the person is in crisis and could be a danger to themselves or others, contact COAST, or the Crisis



Outreach and Support Team. Click the link in the Resources tab to learn more about COAST.

Assistive Devices



An assistive device is a tool or technology that enables a person with a disability to carry out everyday tasks and activities. Personal assistive devices can include wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes, note taking devices, grasping devices, magnifiers or assistive listening devices. When we think of assistive devices, we often think of medical devices; however, everyday products like smartphones for text messaging have opened a whole world of instant communication that was unavailable only a few years ago for people who are deaf, hard of hearing or have learning disabilities.

If you encounter someone using an assistive device, consider the device as an



extension of the person's personal space. Don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission. You should allow customers to keep and use their assistive devices and never move assistive devices or equipment out of your customer's reach. Become familiar with the accessible features and assistive devices that are available in city facilities. Be aware of the locations of accessible washrooms, ramps and elevators and the availability of assistive devices like pool lifts, skating aides and assistive listening devices.

You must know how to use the city-owned equipment or assistive devices in your area of work that can help people with disabilities to access city services and facilities. If you know of an assistive device in your area that you do not know how to operate, speak to your supervisor to find out how to receive training.

Support Persons

A support person can go anywhere a person with a disability can, to help them with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to service. The support person might be a family member, friend, volunteer or paid personnel. A support person in some cases does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications.

Keep in mind that a person with a disability may not always introduce his or her support person. If you are not sure, it is appropriate to ask, "Is this your interpreter or support person?" It's important to always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to their support person, even though the message may be coming through the support person. Where possible, provide written materials to both the person with the disability and the support person. Do not discuss confidential matters in the presence of a support person without first getting the appropriate permission to do so.



It's important to always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to their support person, even though the message may be coming through the support person



Where admission fees are charged, we must provide notice of whether the support person is required to pay the admission fee. In cases where the city requires a person to be accompanied by a support person for reasons of health and safety, then any admission or registration fee will be waived for the support person.

Scenario: Support Persons

Picture this scenario: Ms. Robertson has come into your office for a meeting, and has been accompanied by a second person. These meetings are typically done one-on-one - you've never had two people come in before. How would you react?



Below are three potential responses.

Response 1: "I'm sorry, I can only speak with Ms. Robertson about this because it's confidential."

This response would be inappropriate for two reasons. First, you should always speak to the customer directly, not address the support person or refer to the customer in the third person. Second, a support person can go anywhere a person with a disability can, to help them with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access to service. You are not allowed to ask them to leave, even if the meeting is confidential.

Response 2: "Is this your support person?"

This is an appropriate response. Once you have established that the person accompanying your customer is a support person, you know that they have the right to be present at any meeting that the customer wishes them to attend.



Response 3: "Are you Ms. Robertson's support person?"

This response would be inappropriate, as you must always speak directly to the customer, not to their support person. If the customer uses their support person to communicate, the support person may be the one to respond to you - if this happens, continue to speak directly to the customer.

Service Animals

People with many kinds of disabilities use service animals, who are specially trained to assist an individual with a disability. Service animals can help a person function with greater self-sufficiency, prevent injuries and summon help in a crisis. They can be trained to open doors, pick up items, predict seizures or alert someone to sounds such as a doorbell or telephone ring. People are most familiar with guide dogs used by people who are blind, but not every disability is apparent.

Be aware that many disabilities are invisible, such as deafness, epilepsy, autism, multiple sclerosis, life-threatening allergies, psychiatric disabilities and others. In some cases, you may not be able to determine if someone has a disability or the extent of their disability, and under no circumstances is the service provider allowed to ask about the nature of the person's disability.



The Accessible Customer Service Standard states that an animal is a service animal if it is readily identifiable that the person uses the animal for reasons relating to his or her disability. If it is not obvious, the person may have a letter from a health care professional verifying that the animal is required for reasons relating to his or her disability, or an identification card from the Ministry of the Attorney General. The law requires you to allow a person with a disability and their service animal into all areas that the public would normally be allowed to go. A kitchen where food is prepared is one of the few municipal environments for disallowing a service animal.

When you encounter someone with a service animal, pay attention to the owner, not the service animal. Do not pet, feed or distract a guide dog or service animal from doing its job. The owner must always be in full control of their service animal.

Remember: it is not appropriate to ask the nature of the disability of the service animal user. Do not think of the animal as a pet. If a business has a “no pets allowed” sign, or a park where a city event is happening has a “no dogs” symbol, this does not apply to the service animal. If you deny service to someone using a service animal, you can be at risk for a human rights complaint or other penalty. For example, the Blind Person’s Rights Act fines any offender who denies service to a person who uses a guide dog a maximum of \$5,000 if convicted.

Scenario: Service Animals

Picture this scenario: Tim works at the Tansley Woods Community Centre, at the customer service counter. Someone comes through the front door with a small white dog on a leash. Tim can see that the person is not blind, and he’s never heard of someone using a little dog like that as a service animal. He takes a few minutes to observe the dog with his owner and is not convinced that the dog is not a pet. He walks over to the person, and politely asks them to produce documentation to prove this is a service animal, not a pet.



Did Tim handle this situation appropriately?

- A. Yes
- B. No

A service provider can request documentation from a regulated health professional to identify an animal as a service animal, if it is not clear that it is a working animal. By first observing the animal and its owner, and waiting to ask for documentation, Tim determined that the animal may not be a service animal. In cases where it is not clear, you can ask for documentation, but you are not allowed to ask about the nature of the person's disability (for example: "What do you need that dog for? You don't look like you are blind.>").



Trouble Accessing Goods, Services, or Facilities

If you notice someone having trouble accessing City of Burlington goods, services or facilities, start by asking the person how you can best serve them. Your customer with a disability knows if they need help and how you can provide it. For example, if someone using a wheelchair wishing to access an area without automatic door openers, offer to open the door for them. If information is only available in small print and someone with low vision cannot read the text, work with the department who created the document to reproduce the material in a large print or provide the information in an electronic format. Take the time to listen and understand the needs of each person, and focus on meeting their needs just as you would with any other person.



Take the time to listen and understand the needs of each person, and focus on meeting their needs just as you would with any other person



Disruption of Service

What happens if we can't serve a person with a disability? It is possible that in some circumstances, there will be disruptions in service that will make a public space temporarily inaccessible. For example, if an elevator is under repair, or an outdoor space such as a sidewalk is under construction. If there is a planned disruption in service, it is important that you provide advanced notification on the city's website and through social media, as soon as possible. People with disabilities may have gone to great lengths to access services, such as booking transit or arranging for their support person to accompany them. By providing reasonable notice that a service is temporarily unavailable, you can save someone an unnecessary trip. Notifications will include the reason for the disruption, anticipated duration of the disruption and any alternative facilities or services that are available.

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice quickly and in as many ways as possible. Think about how you might offer another way to access the service when informing the customer who may be affected. A link to the Procedure for Service Disruption is available in the Resources tab.



Summary



Customer service representative: "Now I understand! Next time someone comes in and identifies that they have a disability, I should think of a way to communicate so that I can ask them how they prefer to be accommodated. The next time that woman comes in, I will grab a pen and paper, or use the service counter tablet to write out a message so that we can communicate."

To complete the training, please use the sign-off on the next page.



Please check the appropriate box: (PDF Field)

Employee

Volunteer

First and Last name (please print): _____

Department or Volunteer Activity: _____

By signing and submitting this registration card, I hereby confirm my acceptance of the booklet titled 'Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Training Program, Module 6: Customer Service.

Further, I have read and understand the booklet material which constitutes completion the mandatory training as required under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 and O. Reg. 191/11: Integrated Accessibility Standards.

Please register my compliance.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Employee – Deliver to:

City of Burlington
Human Resources Department
426 Brant Street, P.O. Box 5013
Burlington, ON L7R 3Z6
Attention: AODA Mandatory Training Registration

Volunteer – Please return this form to your Supervisor or Committee Clerk



This document is available as an accessible PDF.
Additional alternative formats are available upon request.

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For more information

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