

ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING GUIDE

PROVIDING SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Public Outreach strives to provide its services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities. Public Outreach is committed to giving individuals with disabilities an opportunity equal to that given to others, to use or benefit from our services.

The ***Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005 (AODA)*** is a Provincial Act with the purpose of achieving accessibility for persons with disabilities in several different areas, including access to goods and services. The AODA includes a regulation entitled “***Accessibility Standards for Customer Service***” for organizations that provide goods and services to the public. Public Outreach’s **Accessible Customer Service Plan** is consistent with the AODA and its Accessibility Standards for Customer Service.

Public Outreach’s **Accessible Customer Service Plan** can be accessed on the Staff Site:
<http://www.publicoutreachstaff.org/WEBPROTECT-staffpolicies.htm> (username: plan, password: girl)

Guiding Principles

DIGNITY: Provide services in a way that allows a person with a disability to maintain self-respect and respect of other people.

INDEPENDENCE: Allow a person with a disability to do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others.

INTEGRATION: Provide service in a way that allows a person with a disability to benefit from the same services as other customers.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY: Give people with disability opportunities equal to that given to others.

How to Interact and Communicate with Customers who have Disabilities

GENERAL TIPS ON PROVIDING SERVICE TO CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITIES

- If you’re not sure what to do, ask your donor/client, “May I help you?”
- Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to his or her support person or companion.
- Avoid stereotypes and make no assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has. Some disabilities are not visible and customers are not required to give you information about disabilities they may have.
- Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond. Listen carefully.
- Take care to use appropriate language and terminology to use when referring to people with disabilities.

- If you cannot understand what your customer is saying, politely ask them to repeat themselves.
- Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without permission.

TIPS ON HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE VISION LOSS

Vision loss can restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some of these customers may use a guide dog or white cane, but others may not. Sometimes it may be difficult to tell if a person has vision loss.

Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision (loss of side vision) or lack of central vision (can't see straight ahead).

Types of assistance your customer might use: Braille, large print, magnification devices, white cane, guide dog, support person such as a sighted guide.

General Tips:

- Don't assume the individual can't see you.
- Don't touch your customer without asking permission.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person. If he or she accepts, walk slowly, but wait for permission before doing so. Lead – don't pull.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment.
- Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show him or her to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- If you need to leave your customer, let him or her know you are leaving and will be back.
- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to him or her, even if he/she is accompanied by a companion.
- There is generally no need to raise your voice as the person does not necessarily have hearing loss.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions. Don't use "over there" or point in the direction.
- Don't be afraid or embarrassed to use words such as "see", "read" and "look". People with vision loss also use these words.
- When providing printed information, offer to read or summarize it.

TIPS ON HOW TO INTERACT AND COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE HEARING LOSS

Types of assistance your customer might use: Hearing aid, paper and pen, personal amplification device (e.g. Pocket Talker), phone amplifier, relay service, Teletypewriter (TTY), hearing ear dog, support person such as a sign language interpreter.

General Tips:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. Generally, the best way is by a gentle touch on the shoulder or with a gentle wave of your hand.
- Ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Move to a well-lit area if available, where your customer can see your face.
- Don't put your hands in front of your face when speaking. Some people read lips.

- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example, pen and paper.
- Be patient if you are using a pen and paper to communicate.
- Look at and speak directly to your customer. Address your customer, not the interpreter or support person.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Confirm that your customer understands you.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area, if possible, so the person can hear or concentrate better.
- Don't assume that the customer knows sign language or reads lips.

TIPS ON HOW TO INTERACT and COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE PHYSICAL DISABILITIES

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability. Mobility devices might be used to help people with difficulty walking.

General Tips:

- Speak naturally and directly to your customer, not to his or her companion or support person.
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone in a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so that you can make eye contact.
- Ask before you help. People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things.
- Respect your customer's personal space. Do not lean over him or her on his or her assistive device.
- Don't move items or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of the person's reach.
- Don't touch assistive devices without permission. If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair, remember to:
 - Wait and follow the person's instructions
 - Confirm that your customer is ready to move
 - Describe what you're going to do before you do it
 - Avoid uneven ground and objects
 - Don't leave the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.
- Let your customer know about accessible features in the immediate area (i.e. automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators, ramps, etc.).

TIPS ON HOW TO INTERACT and COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE MENTAL HEALTH DISABILITIES

Mental health disabilities are not as visible as many other types of disabilities. You may not know that your customer has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. Examples of mental health disabilities include schizophrenia, depression, phobias, as well as bipolar, anxiety and mood disorders.

General Tips

- Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be patient.

- Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with your customer to try to meet needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help.

TIPS ON HOW TO INTERACT AND COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE 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 the person's ability to learn, communicate, socialize and take care of everyday needs. You may not know that someone has this type of disability unless you are told. As much as possible, treat your customers with an intellectual and developmental disability like anyone else.

General Tips

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- If you cannot understand what is being said, simply ask again.
- Be supportive and patient.
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or support person.
- To confirm if your customer understands what you have said, consider asking the person to repeat the message back to you in his or her own words.

TIPS ON HOW TO INTERACT AND COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE LEARNING DISABILITIES

The term "learning disability" describes a range of information processing disorders that can affect how a person acquires, organizes, expresses, retains, understands or uses verbal or non-verbal information. It is important to know that having a learning disability does not mean a person is incapable of learning. Rather, it means they learn in a different way.

Learning disabilities can result in different communication difficulties for people. They can be subtle, such as difficulty reading. They can interfere with your customer's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not know that a person has a learning disability unless you are told.

General Tips

- When you know someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can help.
- Speak naturally, clearly, and directly to your customer. Allow extra time if necessary.
- Remember to communicate in a way that takes into account the customer's disability.
- Be patient and be willing to explain something again, if needed.

TIPS ON HOW TO INTERACT AND COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE SPEECH OR LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENTS

Some people have problems communicating because of their disability. Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions make it difficult to pronounce words or may cause slurring or stuttering. They also may prevent the person from expressing themselves or prevent them from understanding written or spoken language.

General Tips

- Don't assume that because a person has a disability, they also have another. If a customer has difficulty speaking, it doesn't mean they have an intellectual or development disability as well.

- Ask your customer to repeat the information you don't understand.
- Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" if possible.
- Try to allow enough time to communicate with your customer as they may speak more slowly.
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentence. Wait for them to finish.

TIPS ON INTERACTING WITH A CUSTOMER WHO USES A SERVICE ANIMAL

- Remember that a service animal is not a pet. It is a working animal.
- Avoid touching or addressing service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Avoid making assumptions about the animal. Not all service animals wear special collars or harnesses. If you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.
- Remember your customer is responsible for the care and supervision of their service animal. You are not expected to provide care or food for the animal. However, you could provide water for the animal if your customer requests it.

TERMINOLOGY TIPS

- Use "disability" or "disabled", not "handicap" or "handicapped"
- Remember to put people first. It is proper to say "person with a disability", rather than "disabled person".
- If you are not sure about a disability, it's better to wait until the individual describes their situation to you rather than make your own assumption. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.

For more information, or to obtain this document in a different format, contact People & Culture/Human Resources: 1 888 326-5535 x4001 or x4002

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Test Your Awareness and Knowledge

Name: _____

Date: _____

| QUESTIONS | | |
|--|------|-------|
| 1. If a person has vision loss they cannot see anything. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 2. You should not ask your customer to repeat himself if you don't understand him the first time. It might offend him. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 3. You should always speak directly to your customer, not to their support person or companion. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 4. If you notice someone is wearing a hearing aid, speak loudly so he or she can hear you. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 5. A person who is deaf cannot use the phone. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 6. If you see someone who uses a wheelchair having trouble, you should give him or her push. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 7. When guiding a person who has vision loss, you should always take them by the arm. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 8. A person can have a disability and not be held back by it. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 9. You can always tell when someone has a disability. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 10. A positive attitude is important when meeting or helping a person with a disability | TRUE | FALSE |
| 11. Service animals should be treated as pets | TRUE | FALSE |

IMPORTANT:

PLEASE COMPLETE SECTION BELOW, TEAR OR CUT IT OFF, AND PROVIDE IT TO YOUR MANAGER.

I, _____, can confirm that I have read and understand Public Outreach's **Accessible Customer Service Training Guide**, and have completed the **Test Your Knowledge and Awareness exercise**.

Staff Signature

Date

ANSWERS TO TEST:

1. FALSE – Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Many 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 people can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.
2. FALSE – If you cannot understand what your customer is saying, politely ask again.
3. TRUE
4. FALSE – It is important to look directly at someone who is hard of hearing and speak clearly. Shouting may only create sound distortions when amplified through the hearing aid.
5. FALSE – There are different systems that allow someone who is Deaf to use the telephone, such as the Teletypewriter (TTY) or a relay system.
6. FALSE – Don't touch a person's wheelchair or assistive device without permission.
7. FALSE – People who have vision loss may prefer to take your arm when you are guiding them. Ask if they need your assistance first.
8. TRUE – Many people with disabilities can enjoy activities just like everyone else. Often barriers – not disabilities – prevent people with disabilities from participating in everyday life.
9. FALSE – Disabilities can be non-visible and visible. You cannot always tell who has a disability.
10. TRUE – Many people with disabilities can enjoy activities just like everyone else. Often barriers – not disabilities – prevent people from participating in everyday life.
11. FALSE – Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Don't touch or address them.

Source: Accessibility Standard for Customer Service Training Resource, Government of Ontario