

# Accessible Customer Service Guidelines

<b>CATEGORY</b>	Administration and Organization	<b>NUMBER</b>	A22-1
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Accessible Customer Service Guidelines	<b>DATE</b>	O – Feb. 2010 R – July 2021

[Click here for the Accessible Customer Service Policy A22](#)

## Did you know?

1.85 million people in Ontario have a disability

## Did you know?

The word “disability” refers to:

Any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment — or a functional limitation — whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society (Accessible Canada Act, Bill C-81).

## Did you know?

People with disabilities travel, shop and do business. It is our responsibility as an organization to assist and meet the needs of our customers/ clients.

## Did you know?

Information about a disability is personal and private and must be treated with confidentiality. In most cases, it is not necessary to ask for proof of a disability. In order to best serve our clients/ customers, we can ask customers how best we can assist and meet their needs.

## Did you know?

Excellent customer service includes treating all customers equitably, with respect and dignity, and with courtesy.

**Overview** The Children’s Treatment Centre of Chatham-Kent is committed to providing excellent customer service to all residents and visitors, and to treat everyone with dignity and respect.

To do this, we must recognize the diverse needs of all of our residents, including the needs of people with disabilities. We are committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our goods and services and allowing them to benefit from the same

services, in the same place, and in a similar way as other customers that best meet their needs. In 2008, the Government of Ontario launched the accessible customer service standard under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. Its goal is to ensure that people with disabilities have equal opportunities to be served in ways that respect their needs and wishes. The law requires that all public and private sector organizations in Ontario, including Chatham-Kent identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessible customer service. It also states that all staff and third-party service providers must be trained on how to provide accessible customer service.

Every customer's experience should be positive regardless of their disability. It should be flexible and meets the needs of the individual customer. We need to understand that some methods of service may not work for everyone and allow for opportunities to leave comments or suggestions on how to improve our customer service.

This guide will provide you with tips on how best to support a person with a disability, so that you can provide excellent customer service to all Chatham-Kent residents.

### **T.A.L.K.**

When interacting with a person, remember the T.A.L.K. principle:

T= Take the TIME to ask "May I help you?"

A= ASK – don't assume. Never assist unless asked.

L= LISTEN attentively and speak directly to the customer.

K= KNOW the accommodations and special services that are available. If you notice a person is having difficulty accessing our 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. **How to interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities**

Being able to interact and communicate with people with disabilities is a big part of providing accessible customer service. Sometimes the best approach is to ask a person with a disability how you can best communicate with them. Below are some helpful customer service tips that you can use as a guide:

### **Persons who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

A person who has a hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing individuals may use hearing aids, cochlear implants, sign language and /or other assistive listening devices.

### **TIPS**

- Attract the person's attention before you speak. Use eye contact and a simple wave or a light touch on the shoulder to connect visually.
- Make sure the area is well lit where your customer can see your face and read your lips.
- Do not shout. Shouting may only create noise distortions when amplified through a hearing aid.
- Look at and speak clearly and directly to your customer.
- Keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth.
- If your customer has an interpreter, address your customer, not their interpreter.
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier such as writing back and forth. If writing, keep sentences short.
- Speak naturally, with normal expression and at a normal pace.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary.
- Ask one question at a time.
- If your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise, or move to a quieter area.
- Any personal or confidential matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- In group settings, talk one at a time.
- Be patient. A person's first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language.

Do not touch or address service animals. They are working and have to pay attention at all times.

### **Persons who are Deaf/Blind**

A person who is deaf/blind has some degree of both vision and hearing loss. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information. Many individuals who are deaf/blind will communicate using various sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, communication boards, and/ or any combination of these. Many individuals who are deaf/ blind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communication.

Intervenors are trained in a 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. **TIPS:**

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do. People who are deaf/blind have varying degrees of hearing and vision loss. Each individual has a unique experience.
- A customer who is deaf/blind will likely explain to you how to best communicate with them or give you an assistance card or note explaining how to communicate with them.
- Speak directly to your customer and not the intervenor.
- Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer who is deaf/blind.
- Communication may be improved by being in an area with good lighting and reduced background noise.

- Do not 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 is an emergency.
- Do not leave without saying good-bye.

### **People who have physical disabilities**

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. Physical disabilities may affect part of the body or the whole body. Some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair while others may use crutches or a walker. Some people with a physical disability may have difficulty walking long distances or standing for long periods of time. A physical disability may affect a person's ability to perform manual tasks (for example: holding a pen or turning a door knob). **TIPS**

- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space, do not touch, move, or lean on them without permission.
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact and be on the same level.
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, do not leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors. Be sure to return the person's wheelchair to them.
- Keep ramps and aisle ways clear.
- Provide seating for those that cannot stand.

### **People who have vision loss**

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks or see hazards. Vision loss can range from slightly reduced visual acuity to total blindness. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not. **TIPS**

- Do not assume the individual cannot see you. Many people who have low vision still have some sight.
- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to them.
- Ask your customer 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, verbally describe the setting and be precise and descriptive.
- Offer your elbow to guide them if needed. Do not touch without permission.
- Do not touch or address service animals. They are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- When large font is requested, CTC staff will handle this request by printing larger font documents.
- When braille is requested, Accessible Printing Company and/ or the CNIB will be notified to assist the CTC-CK with this request.

- When a sign language interpreter is requested, connecting with the Canadian Hearing Society to assist with this request.

### **People who have learning disabilities**

The term “Learning disabilities” refers to a variety of disorders, such as dyslexia, that affect how a person takes in or retains information and how they understand and process information. Learning disabilities are generally invisible and vary from person to person. A learning 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 considers 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.
- Allow extra time to complete tasks.
- Ask if a customer needs assistance or would like the information presented in a different way.

### **People with speech or language disabilities**

Speech or language disabilities involve the partial or total loss of the ability to speak. Cerebral Palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words, it may affect their pitch or loudness, or it may cause stuttering or slurring. Some people who have severe difficulties with their speech may use a communication board or other assistive devices. **TIPS**

- Do not assume that a person with a speech impairment has another disability.
- Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with “yes” or “no”.
- Be patient. Do not interrupt or finish your customer’s sentences.
- Ask them to repeat as necessary or write their message if needed. Verify your understanding with them.

### **People who have mental health disabilities**

Mental health disabilities can affect a person’s ability to think clearly, process new information, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. They can affect your mood, thinking, and behaviour. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorder. **TIPS**

- Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident, calm, and reassuring.
- Focus on the service they need.

- Try to reduce stress and anxiety in situations and offer support.
- If a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

### **People who have intellectual/developmental disabilities**

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome or Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do every day physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told. A person with an intellectual or developmental disability may have difficulty understanding new information, remembering, and/ or perception of sensory information. **TIPS**

- Do not make assumptions about what a person can do.
- Use clear, plain language.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Be patient and verify your understanding.
- Be prepared to explain information in different ways and provide examples.

### **How to interact with people who use devices**

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 items like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes or speech amplification devices. **TIPS**

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

### **How to interact with people with disabilities who require the assistance of 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 or support people with a mental health disability.

Under the accessible customer service standard, service animals are allowed on parts of the premises that are open to the public or to other third parties, unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law. You may ask a person for a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that their animal is required for reasons relating to their disability if it is not readily apparent. In most cases, service animals wear a harness or vest stating they are a guide dog or service animal. **TIPS**

- 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. If you are not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer.

### **How to interact with people with disabilities who require the assistance of a support person**

Some people with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person, such as an intervener. 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 needs from communicating, to helping with mobility, personal care or medical needs.

According to the accessible customer service standard, a support person must be allowed to accompany an individual with a disability to any part of the premises that is open to the public or to third parties. If an event charges admission, advance notice must be given about what

### **TIPS**

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

Approved By:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Donna Litwin-Makey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Donna Litwin-Makey, Executive Director

Updated: July 12, 2021