
Accessible Customer Service

Training Brochure



In an effort to work to breakdown barriers and obstacles that keep people with disabilities from managing basic activities, the Township must recognize ways to make goods and services available to all.



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Legislation Overview—the AODA

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) was passed in 2005. The goal of the act is to make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025. Ontario has developed mandatory, province-wide standards to achieve this goal and to improve accessibility. A series of five standards have been developed under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR) in key areas of everyday life including:

- Customer service
- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Design of Public Spaces

The Ontario Building Code has also been updated to include accessibility improvements in buildings.

The AODA standards were developed by Provincial committees which included people living with disabilities and business communities. The public then had an opportunity to review and comment on each standard before it was finalized. The Province has committed to undertaking a review of each standard periodically with consultation.

The AODA standards apply to both public and private sector organizations.

This training will help you identify way to best serve the needs of customers living with disabilities, and is one of the requirements that the Township of South-West Oxford must meet under the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR).

Accessible Customer Service Standard

On January 1st, 2008, the Customer Service Standard became the first accessibility standard to be made into regulation under the AODA. The Standard sets out requirements to achieve accessible customer services. This is about understanding that customers with disabilities may have different needs, and finding the best way to help them access goods and services.

The Customer Service Standard applies to all organizations (public, private and not-for-profit) that provide goods or services either directly to the public or to other organizations, and that have one or more employees in Ontario.

Providers of goods and services in Ontario are required to establish policies, practices and procedures that are consistent with the following principles:

- ⇒ The goods or services must be provided in a way that respects the dignity and independence of people with disabilities;
- ⇒ The provision of goods or services to people with disabilities and others must be integrated unless an alternate measure is necessary, whether temporarily or on a permanent basis, to enable a person with a disability to obtain, use or benefit from the goods or services; and
- ⇒ People with disabilities must be given an opportunity equal to that given to others to obtain, use and benefit from the goods and services.



Principles of Accessible Customer Service

- ⇒ Dignity
- ⇒ Integration
- ⇒ Independence
- ⇒ Equality of Opportunity

To ensure accessible customer services to our residents, the Township is required to:

- Set up policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities, and make the policies publicly available.
- Provide for the use of assistive devices, service animal and support persons which may be used by people with disabilities to access goods and services;
- Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account their disability.
- Let people know ahead of time what, if any, admission fee may be charged for a support person.
- Let the public know when facilities or services that people with disabilities may use to access goods and services are temporarily unavailable (e.g. elevator or sidewalk unavailable).
- Ensure that all members of the organization are trained on accessible customer service and how to interact with people with different disabilities.
- Receive and respond to feedback about the way the Township provides goods or services in the community. Ensure accessibility of options to provide feedback.

Interacting and communicating 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. If you notice a person is having difficulty accessing our services, ask, “may I help you?”. Be patient and remember your customers are the best source of information about their own needs.

Physical Disabilities

Physical disabilities may come in many forms and degrees of severity. The most visible would include a person using a wheelchair or a person with an amputation. However, many physical disabilities are invisible or episodic. For example, persons who have heart disease, asthma or lung disease may not show visible signs most of the time but occasionally will suffer from their disabilities. Some barriers individuals with physical disabilities might face include being unable to reach high counters or products, being unable to stand for long periods of time, or becoming light-headed without notice.

Some **best practice tips** for assisting people with physical disabilities include:

- Always ask before touching or moving any assistive devices that a person may be using;
- Ensure the environment is clear and free of obstacles; and
- If you are providing one-to-one support, consider pulling up a chair and talking to the customer at their eye level.

Speech or Language

An individual may have speech or language disabilities resulting from conditions such as cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or other conditions that make it difficult to clearly pronounce words or communicate with written or spoken language. These disabilities also may prevent the person from expressing themselves or prevent them from understanding written or spoken language. Some people who have severe disabilities may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

Some **best practice tips** for assisting people with speech or language disabilities include:

- If you don't understand the first time, it is okay to ask the person to repeat the information;
- Consider asking closed-ended questions inviting a "yes" or "no" response; and
- Be patient, understanding and reassuring.

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Similar to other disabilities, there are varying degrees of hearing loss, ranging from missing certain words, sounds or frequencies to complete hearing loss. Deaf people often use sign language to communicate, and identify as a cultural minority, rather than seeing themselves as disabled. They may be bilingual, with sign language as their native language and a spoken language as their second language. Deaf people are proud of their language and culture and signal it with a capital "D".



The major difference between Deaf people and people who are hard of hearing is that Deaf people use their eyes and visual sense for communicating—generally sign language—while people who are hard of hearing still use their ears and their auditory sense. Some barriers that individuals with hearing disabilities might face include not hearing others approaching them, not responding to alarms or other emergency situations, and not understanding speech in a noisy environment.

Some **best practice tips** for assisting Deaf people or those who are hard of hearing including:

- Follow the customer's lead in communicating. Deaf people or those who are hard of hearing may communicate in various ways, such as sign language, speech and writing. Let them choose.
- If the person writes, respond to them in writing. Have paper and pen handy if the person gestures that they want to write.
- If the person responds by talking and lip-reading, look directly at them and pronounce words clearly using a normal tone or voice. Keep your hands and any objects away from your mouth and face. Rephrase or substitute words rather than repeating yourself.
- Pointing is perfectly acceptable in the Deaf community. Feel free to point to products or information.
- In emergency situations, assist the individual to recognize and respond to the emergency.
- Persons relying on the use of a hearing aid may find it difficult to hear in a noisy environment. If this is the case, suggest moving to a quieter location.

Vision

There are different types of vision disabilities and different levels of severity. Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly, but very few people with vision loss are completely unable to see.



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.

Vision loss can affect a person's ability to read or navigate and can cause trouble with depth perception. Sometimes it may be difficult to tell whether a person has vision loss. Individuals with vision disabilities may face barriers that include being unable to move in tight spaces or stairwells, needing additional time to recognize changes to the environment, and having difficulties understanding pointing or motioning in a general direction.

Some **best practice tips** for assisting people with vision disabilities, include:

- Identify yourself so that the person knows who is talking: offer assistance, but wait until the person accepts your offer or makes a request.
- When providing written material, offer to read or summarize it.
- If you need to leave the person to get something, let them know where you are going and when you will return.

- Be clear and precise when giving directions: for example, “two steps behind you”, “immediately to your right”, and so forth.
- Before opening a door, ask whether they want you to open it. Indicate whether the door opens to the left or right and whether it is pulled or pushed.
- If a person requests assistance with guiding or mobility, offer your arm, asking which arm is better, and ask for further directions on how to proceed. Walk at a pace that works for the person, and verbally advise of obstacles in the environment, such as announcing handrails, doors, stairs and describing the surrounding areas.

Deaf-blindness

Deaf-blindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss that poses challenge with communication and getting around. Some people who are deaf-blind will have some sight or hearing ability, while others will have neither, and instead rely on their other senses. People who are deaf-blind may communicate in a variety of ways, including sign language, tactile sign language, Braille, communication devices, and communication boards. Deaf-blindness affects access to information; it does not indicate a person’s intelligence.



Some people who are deaf-blind may have additional disabilities, such as a development disability. These individuals often use the services of an intervenor to relay information,

facilitate auditory and visual information, and act as sighted guides. The intervenor is an individual trained in communication with people who are deaf-blind. Some barriers that individual might face include accessing information, maneuvering around tight spaces, and communicating needs or questions.

Some **best practice tips** for assisting individuals who are deaf-blind include:

- Understanding that communication can take some time and having patience.
- Asking what would make the person the most comfortable and respecting their needs; and
- Avoiding touching the customer or sudden movements that may catch them off-guard, unless it is an emergency.

Mental Health

Sometimes you will be unaware that you are interacting with a person who has a mental health disability. In other circumstances, you may encounter an individual who is in crisis or is struggling and you need to know how to assist them. Examples of mental health disabilities include schizophrenia, depression, phobias, as well as bipolar, anxiety, and mood disorders. Some signs may be increased anxiety, panic attacks, sudden mood swings, hallucinations, an inability to think clearly, difficulty remembering, and poor concentration.

Some best practice tips for assisting individuals with mental health disabilities include:

- Remembering the importance of listening skills, as you need to understand the real issue to know how you can offer help;

- Asking how you can help and trying to work with the person to find a solution; and
- Being confident, patient and reassuring.

Intellectual

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 their everyday needs. You may not know that someone has this type of disability unless you are told about it.

You need to treat a person with an intellectual disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate that you treated them with respect. Some barriers that individuals with intellectual disabilities might face include difficulties understanding written documents and confusion when large amount of information are shared quickly.

Some best practice tips for assisting people with intellectual disabilities include:

- Providing examples when sharing and providing information;
- Remembering that the person can make their own decisions;
- Use plain language;
- Being patient and understanding; and
- Providing information in smaller pieces.

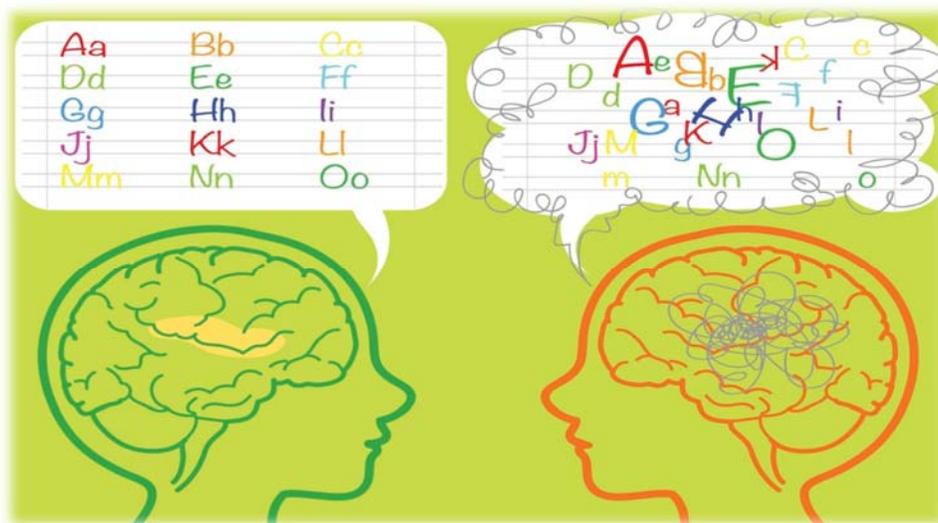
Learning

Learning disabilities are generally invisible and can vary

greatly from person to person. Learning disabilities can affect verbal and non-verbal information acquisition, retention, understanding and processing. People with a learning disability may have average or above average intelligence, but take in and process information and express knowledge in difference ways. Learning disabilities can result in difficulties with reading, counting money, problem-solving, time management, way-finding, and processing information.

Some best practice tips for assisting people with learning disabilities include:

- Responding to any request for verbal information and assisting with completing forms and tasks with courtesy;
- If necessary, allowing extra time to complete tasks and projects; and
- Be patient.



Assistive Devices

Assistive devices can enable people to do every tasks like moving, communicating, reading, or lifting. Examples may include:

- White canes;
- Wheelchairs;
- Walkers;
- Listening devices;
- Hearing aids;
- Magnification devices;
- Communication boards;
- Smartphones;
- Speech-generating devices.



Some **general tips** for working with assistive devices include:

- Being open and willing to work with them;
- Focus on the customer and not the device;
- Ensure that the customer and the assistive device have an appropriate amount of space;
- Avoid blocking, knocking or bumping into the assistive device;
- Ask permission before moving any assistive device; wait for and follow the customer's instructions; and
- If you move a customer that is using a wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position (e.g. facing a wall or in the path of an opening door).

Support Persons

A support person is an individual hired or chosen to accompany a person with a disability in order to provide service or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs, or accessing services. Personal care needs may include assistance with eating or using the washroom. Medical needs may include ensuring that medication is taken on time, monitoring someone's health conditions and providing injections. A support person may be a paid worker, volunteer, family member or friend and does not necessarily require any special training or certification to offer support.

Some **general tips** for working with a support person include:

- Introduce yourself to both the customer and the support person;
- Address and talk to the customer, even if the support person is responding;
- Avoid having side conversations with the support person;
- Provide written materials to the customer and the support person; and
- Ensure that the customer and the support person stay together.



Service Animals

Service Animals offer many types of assistance including:

- ⇒ Preventing a child with autism from running into danger and helping them respond when over stimulated;
- ⇒ Guiding by following the directions of the owner and alerting the owner to obstacles and changes in elevation;
- ⇒ Psychiatric services by retrieving and prompting the person to take medicine, activate medical alerts, and leading the person out of crowds;
- ⇒ Hearing by alerting the owner to sounds, leading them to the source of the sound, and by using a special signal to alert the owner of fire alarms or emergency situations;
- ⇒ Seizure assistance by steering the owner away from danger during a seizure, activating medical alerts, and notifying the owner of an oncoming seizure; and
- ⇒ Mobility by pulling wheelchairs, carrying objects, turning handles, activating push buttons and providing balance.

If you are not sure whether the animal is a service animal, ask the customer. Generally, customers will have verification which may include an identification card, certificate of training or letter from a physician or nurse. It is the owner's responsibility to maintain control of the service animal. If it become disruptive, ask the person whether you can do anything to assist them. Sometimes offering them a private location to calm the animal may help.

Some general **rules** for handling service animals include:

- Ensure that the customer and the service animal are not separated;
- Avoid touching, petting or talking to the animal; when the animal is out with the customer, it is working and should not be distracted; and
- Get permission from the owner before providing water or anything else to the service animal.

It is important to know that there are strict guidelines around animals and food. However, service dogs, including guide dogs, because of the nature of their work, are permitted in location where food is served, sold and offered for sale—they are not permitted in locations where food is manufactured or processed.



Service Disruptions

Service disruptions should be communicated immediately in a variety of methods. You should indicate when service will resume and suggest alternatives to be used during the disruption. Service disruptions may include:

- A broken elevator;
- An unplanned closure of the office or a cancelled meeting;
- Construction barriers (e.g. closed roads, sidewalks or entrances);
- In accessible parking or walkways.

Accessibility in SWOX

In December, 2013, the Township of South-West Oxford created and adopted the first Multi-Year Accessibility Plan. Creating a community where every person can participate is important for people, businesses and building a sense of community. For these reasons, it is important that the Township continue to plan for the future so that Township facilities and services are accessible and welcoming for everyone. In 2019, Township Council approved the updated Multi-Year Accessibility Plan for 2019 to 2023.

The Township's Accessibility Plan states that the Township is committed to inspiring all people in a way that allows them to maintain their dignity and independence. We believe in integration and equal opportunity and are committed to meeting the needs of people with disabilities in a timely manner. The Township plans to do this by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility and meeting accessibility requirements under the AODA.

The complete Accessibility Plan may be viewed on the Township's website, or a copy may be obtained by contacting the Clerk at 519-485-0477 ext. 7023 or via email at clerk@swox.org.

Township staff will report annually to Council on the status of the Township's Accessibility Plan and the goals outlined in the plan.

Comments/Feedback

The Township is committed to ensuring that accessibility is considered throughout our services, facilities and business operations. Your feedback is always welcome on this training brochure, or any other Township service or facility. Feedback helps us to identify areas for improvement. Comments, questions or ideas may be forward to:

Julie Forth, Clerk

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**If you are interested in obtaining more
information about accessibility laws in Ontario**

please visit:

www.ontario.ca/page/accessibility.com

AODA

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act

