



Accessible Customer Service Etiquette

Handbook for staff, volunteers
and service providers.

It's about treating everyone with respect and
dignity, and as simple as asking:

“How may I help you?”

Did you know?

15%
of Ontarians
have a disability.

Excellent accessible customer service considers the customer's dignity, independence, respect and equity.

“Disability” can mean: a physical, sensory, intellectual, learning or speech impairment, or a physical or mental health condition.

By 2036, one in five Ontario residents will experience a disability.

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. Always focus on the person, not their disability.

People who have 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 moving, standing or sitting.

Service etiquette tips:

- Speak directly to the customer
- Ask before you help
- Respect personal space
- Don't move any items they may have
- Describe what you are going to do before you do it
- Don't leave your customer in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position

People who have impaired vision:

Impaired vision can restrict a customer's ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. It might be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Some might use a guide dog or a white cane.

Service etiquette tips:

- Don't assume the customer can't see you
- Speak directly to the customer
- Offer your elbow to guide them. If they accept your guidance, walk slowly, wait for permission
- Identify landmarks for the customer
- Be precise and descriptive with information
- Don't leave the customer alone

People who are deafblind:

A person who is deafblind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deaf blind will be accompanied by an intervenor — a professional support person who helps with communication.

Service etiquette tips:

- Speak directly to your customer, not the support person
- Identify yourself to the support person

People who have hearing loss:

Hearing can be lost or diminished as a result of heredity, aging, injury or disease. It can occur gradually over the course of a lifetime or traumatically in an instant. People who have hearing loss may be deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. These are terms used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

Service etiquette tips:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking with a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand
- Look directly at the customer
- Use pen and paper (if necessary)
- Speak clearly, keep your hands away from your face
- Reduce background noise
- Ensure appropriate lighting



People who have intellectual or developmental disabilities:

These disabilities can mildly or profoundly affect one's ability to learn. You may not know that someone has an intellectual disability unless you are told or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.

Service etiquette tips:

- Don't assume what the customer can or cannot do
- Use plain language
- Take your time, be patient
- Ask, "Do you understand this?"
- Provide one piece of information at a time – step-by-step instruction
- Use simple concepts to explain information

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. A learning disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

Service etiquette tips:

- Take your time, be patient
- Demonstrate a willingness to assist
- Speak normally, clearly and directly to your customer
- Provide information in a way that works for your customer (e.g., pen and paper)
- Be prepared to explain any materials you provide

People who have speech or language impairments:

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may cause slurring or make pronouncing words difficult. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

Service etiquette tips:

- Don't make assumptions
- Give the customer the time they need to get their point across
- Ask "yes or no" questions if possible
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences
- Use pen and paper (if necessary)
- Say, "I don't understand, can you repeat that?"

People who have mental health issues:

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health issue is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or a panic disorder.

Service etiquette tips:

- Treat the customer with the same level of respect and consideration
- Be confident, calm and reassuring
- Do not be confrontational
- Ask how best to help, if the customer is in crisis
- Take the customer seriously
- Don't take things personally



How to interact with customers who use assistive 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 wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes or speech amplification devices.

Best practice

Customers are permitted to use assistive devices to access the goods and services, unless excluded by law. Representatives need to ensure that customers are aware of accessible features on the premises that would be appropriate to their needs (e.g., TTY phone, accessible washrooms, seating, etc.).

Service etiquette tips:

- Ask permission to touch or handle any personal assistive device
- Keep assistive devices or equipment within the customer's reach
- Let the customer know about assistive devices available on the premises that are appropriate to their needs
- Ensure all potential barriers to the use of assistive devices are removed where possible
- Offer assistive devices in a manner that respects the customer's dignity and independence
- Don't lean on or reach over the customer



“Breaking Barriers Together”

Visit www.accesson.ca for more information on welcoming people of all abilities.

How to interact with customers who require the assistance of a support worker

Some people with disabilities may be accompanied by a support person. A support person might help the customer with a variety of things including communicating, helping with mobility, personal care and medical needs. A support person can be a trained personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.

Best practice

Support workers are welcome to attend and participate in the goods and services provided. Depending on the service area and the activity, an admission fee may not be required.

Representatives must ensure that notice is given in advance if there is a cost for support workers so that customers with disabilities know what to expect.

Service etiquette tips:

- Speak directly to the customer, not the support person
- Allow both persons entrance to the premise/activity together
- Ensure that the customer has access to the support person while on the premises
- Ask for consent if confidential information is going to be shared when a support person is present



How to interact with customers with service animals and dog guides

Service animals and dog guides are used by people with many different kinds of disabilities. Dog guides have traditionally been associated with people who are blind as Canine Vision Dog Guides. Dog guides are also trained as Special Skills Dogs that can alert an individual to an oncoming seizure and lead them to safety, or Hearing Ear Guide Dogs for people who are deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. Other less traditional animals may be used by persons who are autistic or have other medical conditions.

Best practice

Service animals and dog guides are permitted in areas that are open to the public, unless prohibited by law. If excluded by law, steps must be taken to make sure that our goods and services can still be accessed by the person with a disability.

In most cases, a service animal is readily apparent. The animal may be wearing a harness, saddle bags, or have a certificate or identification card from a service animal training school. The person will be using the animal to assist them with doing things such as opening doors or retrieving items.

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.

Service etiquette tips:

- Allow customers and their service animals access to all public areas
- Remember a service animal is not a pet — it is a working animal
- Ensure that the customer has control and supervision of the service animal
- Avoid talking to, touching or making eye contact with the service animal
- Ensure the animal is an official service animal if not readily apparent

Summary

If in doubt when dealing with customers with disabilities, remember the following:

1. 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.

2. Assess access daily

Be alert to both visible and invisible barriers in the workplace. A barrier is anything that keeps someone with a disability from participating in the social or economic life of our community. Barriers may be: architectural or structural, information and communication, technology, systemic (policies and procedures) or attitude.

Resources

Information has been gathered from Ministry of Community and Social Services, Accessibility Directorate of Ontario.

For more information on the AODA, visit www.accesson.ca.



Accessibility compliance registration

Please print:

Name:

Title/role:

Work site location:

I have read and understand the booklet material, which constitutes completion of the mandatory Accessible Customer Service training as required under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA).

Indicate below to which group you belong:

- Volunteers who interact with the public
- Contractors who interact with the public
- Staff who interact with the public

Signature

Date