



Accessible Customer Service:

A Guide for Innisfil
Service Providers

Innisfil is committed to providing excellent and equitable customer service. To do this, we must recognize that our residents have different needs and abilities, and that people living with disabilities must receive the same level of customer service as everyone else. This is part of our commitment to equity but it is also a requirement under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act's (AODA) Accessible Customer Service Standard.

The AODA requires all public and private sector organizations in Ontario, including Innisfil, to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessible customer service. It also states that all staff and third party service providers (e.g. contractors and volunteers) must be trained on how to provide accessible customer service.

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

**If you have questions related to accessibility or the standards outlined in the AODA, please contact Customer Service at 705-736-3710 or email removingbarriers@innisfil.ca*



Did You Know?

- ✦ 1.8 million people in Ontario have a disability
- ✦ Not all disabilities are visible. A disability may involve:
 - A physical impairment.
 - A sensory impairment.
 - A cognitive or developmental disorder.
 - A chronic disease.
- ✦ Excellent customer service is defined by how you adapt your communication to meet the unique needs of the people you serve. This means that you must treat everyone with dignity and respect.



When interacting with a person living with a disability, 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 your goods or services, simply ask how you can help. Be patient and remember that 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

It is best to approach communication with your customers by asking them how you can best communicate with them. Here are some tips for communicating with residents who have a disability:

People Who Are Deafblind

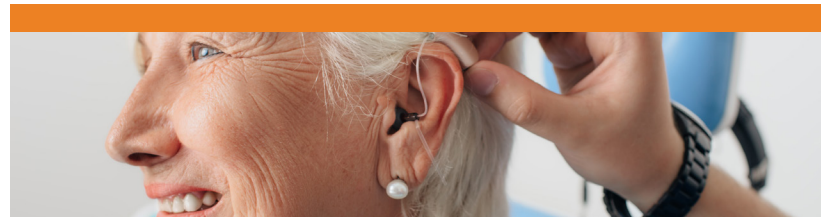
Many people who are deafblind have some degree of both hearing and vision, and many who are deafblind will be accompanied by a personal support person who helps with communication.

- ✦ Speak directly to your customer, not to their support person.
- ✦ If the customer does not explain how to best communicate with them, assist with a card or note.

People Who Have Hearing Loss

There are different types of hearing loss and there are terms used to describe the different levels of hearing. These include deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing.

- ✦ Attract the customer's attention before speaking. Try a gentle wave of your hand.
- ✦ Make sure you are all in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face and read your lips.
- ✦ If your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce the background noise or move to a more quiet area.
- ✦ If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (e.g. using a communication board or a pen and paper).



People Who Have Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and only some use mobility devices (e.g. a wheelchair, a scooter, or crutches). A physical disability could be a spinal cord injury, severe arthritis, or even a heart condition that would prevent someone from being able to walk long distances.

- ✦ If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so that you can make eye contact at the same level.
- ✦ Don't touch items or equipment, such as canes or wheelchairs, without permission. Those are the customer's personal property and you could risk damaging the devices.
- ✦ If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous, or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.

People Who Have Vision Loss

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, local landmarks, or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

- ✦ Don't assume that an individual who is legally blind can't 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 aloud any printed material (e.g. a menu or a schedule of fees).
- ✦ Offer your elbow to guide them if needed.



People Who Have Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities include a variety of disorders, such as dyslexia, that affect how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information that you are providing.

- ✦ Be patient - it may take someone living with a learning disability more time to process information, to understand, and to respond.
- ✦ Try to provide information in a way that takes into account 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.

People With Speech Or Language Impairments

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or may cause slurring. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive device.

- ✦ Don't assume a person with a speech impairment has another disability.
- ✦ Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or "no".
- ✦ Be patient. Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentence.



People Who Have Mental Health Disabilities

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate, or remember things. Mental health disability 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 panic disorder.

- ✦ Treat a person with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- ✦ Be confident, calm, and reassuring.
- ✦ If a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.
- ✦ For regular customers, you can ask to keep an emergency contact (e.g. a family member or support worker) on file.

People Who Have Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities, and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

- ✦ Don't make assumptions about what a person can do.
- ✦ Use plain language.
- ✦ Provide one piece of information at a time.



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 things like wheelchairs, hearing aids, white canes, or speech amplification devices.

- ✦ Don't touch or handle any assistive devices without permission.
- ✦ Don't 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 phone with TY service, accessible washrooms, etc.).



How To Interact With People With Disabilities Who Require 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. Under the AODA's Customer Service Standard, service animals are allowed on part 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.

✦ 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're 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 intervenor. 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 things 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 admission fee will be charged for a support person.

- ✦ If you're 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.

For more information on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), or the Accessible Customer Service Standard, visit www.innisfil.ca

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