



# **ACCESSIBLE CUSTOMER SERVICE**

## **Best Practices and Procedures**

## **COMMUNICATION**

### **Talk About Disabilities - Choose the Right Word**

Words can influence and reinforce the public's perception of people with disabilities. They can create either a positive view of people with disabilities or an indifferent, negative depiction.

Here are some general tips that can help make your communication and interactions with or about people with all types of disabilities more successful.

- Use disability or disabled, not handicap or handicapped.
- Never use terms such as retarded, dumb, psycho, moron or crippled. These words are very demeaning and disrespectful to people with disabilities.
- Remember to put people first. It is proper to say person with a disability, rather than disabled person.
- If you don't know someone or if you are not familiar with the disability, it's better to wait until the individual describes his/her situation to you, rather than to make your own assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.

The following preferred words and phrases will help you choose language that is neither demeaning nor hurtful. People with disabilities prefer these terms.

Instead of	Please use
Afflicted by cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.	Person who has cerebral palsy. Person who has multiple sclerosis. Person who has arthritis, etc. Person with a disability.
Aged (the)	Seniors
Autistic	A person with autism. A person who has autism.
Birth Defect, congenital defect, deformity	A person who has a congenital disability. A person with a disability since birth.
Blind (the), visually impaired (the)	A person who is blind. A person with a vision disability. A person with vision loss. A person with a visual impairment A person with low vision.
Brain damaged	A person with a brain injury. A person with a head injury.
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound	A person who uses a wheelchair.
Crazy, insane, lunatic, psycho, mental, mental patient, maniac, neurotic, psychotic, unsound mind, schizophrenic	A person with a mental health disability. A person who has depression. A person with schizophrenia.
Cripple, crippled, lame	A person with a disability. A person with a mobility impairment or, more specifically, a person who walks with crutches. A person who uses a walker. A person who uses a mobility aid. A person with arthritis, etc.
Deaf (the), hearing impaired (the) When referring to the deaf community and their culture (whose preferred mode of communication is sign language) it is acceptable to use "the Deaf."	A person who is deaf (person with profound hearing loss who communicates using sign language.) A person who is deafened (deaf later in life.) A person who is hard of hearing (person with hearing loss who communicates primarily by speech.) A person with a hearing loss.

INSTEAD OF:	PLEASE USE:
Deaf and dumb, deaf mute	A person who is deaf without speech.
Differently Abled	A person with a disability.
Disabled (the)	People with disabilities.
Elderly (the)	Seniors, older adults.
Epileptic	Person who has epilepsy.
Fits, spells, attacks	Seizures.
Handicapped (the)	Person with a disability. The term handicapped may be used when referring to an environmental or attitudinal barrier as in "a person who is handicapped by a set of stairs leading to the entrance."
Hidden disability	Non-visible disability.
Invalid	Person with a disability.
Learning disabled, learning disordered, dyslexic	A person with a learning disability or people with learning disabilities.
Mentally retarded, idiot, simple, retarded, feeble minded, imbecile	A person with an intellectual disability. A person with a developmental disability.
Midget, Dwarf	A person of short stature. A person who has a form of dwarfism. A little person. A person diagnosed with "Achondroplasia, SED, or whatever their specific diagnosis is", a form of dwarfism.
Mongoloid, Mongolism	Person with Down Syndrome. One can use this terminology only when it is directly relevant. A person with an intellectual or developmental disability.
Normal	Person who is not disabled. Person who is able bodied. Specifically, a person who is sighted, a hearing person, a person who is ambulatory.
Patient	Person with a disability. The word patient may be used when referring to a relationship between a medical professional and a client.
Physically challenged	Person with a physical disability.
Spastic	Person who has muscle spasms.
Stutterer	A person with a speech impairment or impediment.
Victim of/suffers from/ stricken with cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.	Person who has cerebral palsy. Person who has multiple sclerosis, etc. Person with a disability.
Visually impaired (the)	A person with a visual impairment.

**PHYSICAL** disabilities include a range of functional limitations from minor difficulties in moving or coordinating one part of the body, through muscle weakness, tremors, and paralysis. Physical disabilities can be congenital such as Muscular Dystrophy; or acquired, such as tendonitis. A physical disability may affect an individual's ability to:

- Perform manual tasks such as holding a pen, turning a key or gripping a door knob
- Move around independently
- Control the speed or coordination of movements
- Reach, pull or manipulate objects
- Have strength or endurance

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to your customer. Don't speak to someone who is with them
- People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are part of a person's personal space, don't touch, move or lean on them
- Provide your customer information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.)
- Keep ramps and corridors free of clutter
- If a counter top is too high or wide, step around it to provide service
- Provide seating for those that cannot stand in line
- Be patient. Customers will identify their needs to you



**HEARING** loss can cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words. A person who is deaf, deafened or hard-of hearing may be unable to:

- Use a public telephone
- Understand speech in noisy environments
- Pronounce words clearly enough to be understood by strangers

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. Remember, customers who are deaf or hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating.

Here are some tips on service customers who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand
- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout. Speak clearly
- Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood
- Face the person and keep your hands and other objects away from your face and mouth
- Deaf people may use a sign language interpreter to communicate – always direct your attention to the Deaf person – not the interpreter
- Any personal (e.g. financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds
- If necessary, write notes back and forth to share information
- Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times

**DEAF-BLINDNESS** is a combination of hearing and vision loss. The result for a person who is deaf-blind is significant difficulty accessing information and performing daily activities. Deaf-blindness interferes with communication, learning, orientation and mobility. People who are deaf-blind communicate using various sign language systems, Braille, telephone devices, communication boards and any combination thereof. Many people who are deaf-blind use the services of an Intervener who relays information and facilitates auditory and visual information and acts as a sighted guide.

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating.

Interveners are trained in 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.

Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf-blind:

- Do not assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deaf-blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- A customer who is deaf-blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them
- Do not touch or address the 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's an emergency
- Understand that communication can take some time – be patient.
- Direct your attention to your customer, not the Intervener.



**VISION** disabilities reduce one's ability to see clearly. Very few people 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 can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Vision loss can result in:

- Difficulty reading or seeing faces
- Difficulty maneuvering in unfamiliar places
- Inability to differentiate colours or distances
- A narrow field of vision
- The need for bright light, or contrast
- Night blindness

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Vision disabilities can restrict your customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a vision disability. Others may use a service animal or white cane.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have vision disabilities:

- Verbally identify yourself before making physical contact
- If the person uses a service animal – do not touch or approach the animal – it is working.
- Verbally describe the setting, form, location as necessary
- Offer your arm to guide the person. Do not grab or pull.
- Never touch your customer without asking permission, unless it is an emergency
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye

**INTELLECTUAL** disabilities affect a person's ability to think and reason. It may be caused by genetic factors such as Down Syndrome, exposure to environmental toxins, such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, brain trauma or psychiatric disorders. A person with an intellectual disorder may have difficulty with:

- Understanding spoken and written information
- Conceptual information
- Perception of sensory information
- Memory

### **Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

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 one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has this disability unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or use body language.

As much as possible, treat your customers with an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

Here are some tips on serving customers who have an intellectual or developmental disability:

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do
- Use clean, simple language
- Be prepared to explain and provide examples regarding information
- Remember that the person is an adult and unless you are informed otherwise, can make their own decisions
- Be patient and verify your understanding
- If you can't understand what is being said, don't pretend. Just ask again
- Provide one piece of information at a time
- Speak directly to your customer, not to their companion or attendant

**SPEECH** disabilities involve the partial or total loss of the ability to speak. Typical disabilities include problems with:

- Pronunciation
- Pitch and loudness
- Hoarseness or breathiness
- Stuttering or slurring

**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

Here are some tips on serving customers with speech or language impairments:

- If possible, communicate in a quiet environment
- Give the person your full attention. Don't interrupt until they finish their sentence.
- Ask them to repeat as necessary, or to write their message.
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'
- Verify your understanding
- Patience, respect and willingness to find a way to communicate are the best tools

**LEARNING** disabilities include a range of disorders that effect verbal and non-verbal information acquisition, retention, understanding and processing. People with a learning disability have average or above average intelligence, but take in and process information and express knowledge in different ways. Learning disabilities can result in difficulties with:

- Reading
- Problem solving
- Time management
- Way finding
- Processing information.

**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

- Learning disabilities are generally invisible and an individual's ability to function varies greatly – respond to any requests for verbal information, assistance in filling in forms and so on with courtesy.
- Allow extra time to complete tasks if necessary.

**MENTAL HEALTH** disabilities include a range of disorders however there are three main types of mental health disability:

- Anxiety
- Mood
- Behavioral

People with mental health disabilities may seem edgy or irritated; act aggressively; be perceived as pushy or abrupt; be unable to make decision; start laughing or get angry for no apparent reason.

**Best practices and procedures for Customer Service:**

- Treat each person as an individual. Ask what would make him/her the most comfortable and respect his/her needs to the maximum extent possible.
- Try to reduce stress and anxiety in situations.
- Stay calm and courteous, even if the customer exhibits unusual behavior; focus on the service they need and how you can help.

**SMELL** disabilities can involve the inability to sense smells or a hypersensitivity to odours and smells. A person with a smelling disability may have allergies to certain odours, scents or chemicals or may be unable to identify dangerous gases, smoke, fumes and spoiled food.

**TOUCH** disabilities can affect a person's ability to sense texture, temperature, vibration or pressure. Touch sensations may be reduced or heightened resulting in a hypersensitivity to touch, temperature, or the opposite, numbness and the inability to feel touch sensations

**TASTE** disabilities can limit the experience of the four primary taste sensations; sweet, bitter, salty and sour. A person with a taste disability may be unable to identify spoiled food or noxious substances.

**OTHER** disabilities result from a range of other conditions, accidents, illnesses and diseases including ALS, asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, environmental sensitivities, seizure disorders, heart disease, stroke and joint replacement.

Disabilities are not always visible or easy to distinguish.

## **ASSISTIVE DEVICES**

The term “assistive devices” refers to an auxiliary aid such as communication aids, cognition aids, personal mobility aids and medical aids (i.e. canes, crutches, wheelchairs, or hearing aids). The following assistive aids are available through the Township:

1. Accessible Telephone Service

If enquiries for telephone services are received for hearing impaired or vision impaired individuals, please refer them to Bell Canada. Teletype (TTY) is older technology and the municipality will not be purchasing any equipment for this purpose.

The Bell Relay Service operator is available to assist in placing or receiving calls to/from persons who use a TTY/teletypewriter. The operator will also assist in placing VCO (Voice Carry Over) and HCO (Hearing Carry Over) calls. VCO mode allows a person with a hearing disability to speak directly to the other party. HCO mode allows a person with a speech disability to hear the other party. There is no charge for local calls.

Information regarding this service is provided in the local telephone book under “Special Needs”.

2. Electronic Door Openers

The electronic door openers located at the following locations do not have an off/on switch.

- a) Spencerville Public Library
- b) Cardinal Public Library

The electronic door openers do not have to be turned on in the morning or switched off when the building is not occupied.

### 3. Accessible Parking and Accessible Ramps

#### a) Accessible Parking

The accessible parking places for all municipal buildings should be connected or integrated with a barrier-free path of travel, shall be painted blue and marked by an identifying marking consisting of the International Symbol for the Disabled (See below)



Wherever possible, the accessible path of travel shall be designed to avoid entering the vehicular routes and drives and be part of the shortest accessible route to the building or facility entrance.

**The accessible parking places shall be cleared of snow as soon as practicable.**

#### a) Accessible Ramps

**Accessible ramps at all municipal building locations shall be cleared of snow as soon as practicable.**

#### 4. Municipal Website

The Township of Edwardsburgh/Cardinal's website supports screen reading software. A screen reader is a software application that attempts to identify and interpret what is being displayed on the screen. This interpretation is then re-presented to the user with text-to-speech, sound icons or a Braille output device. Screen readers are a form of assistive technology useful to people who are blind, visually impaired, illiterate or learning disabled.

When adding new information to the website, consideration should be given to:

- a) including a brief description for all pictures since the image description is read out loud by the program.



*(a picture of a little boy wearing a blue bathing suit with a red/yellow life jacket and jumping into the water)*

- b) making links descriptive of the destination they point towards. (“Please click here for a printable version of the schedule.” would be more accessible written as “A printable version of the schedule is also available.”)

## 5. Municipal Elections

Municipalities must meet or exceed the accessibility requirements of the Municipal Elections Act and the barrier-free design requirements of the Ontario Building Code when addressing the accessibility of municipal voting facilities.

When making arrangements for municipal elections, the Township Clerk:

- a) Will provide election materials in accessible formats;
- b) Shall make such changes to some or all of the ballots as considered necessary or desirable to allow electors with visual impairments to vote without assistance;
- c) Shall have regard to the needs of the electors with disabilities when choosing a location for a voting location;
- d) Shall instruct a Deputy Returning Officer to attend on an elector anywhere within the area designated as the voting place, in order to allow a person with a disability to vote.

Municipal candidates must provide candidate materials in accessible formats.

6. Council Meetings and Committee Meetings held in the Council Chambers

The Council Chambers is accessible to persons with physical disabilities through the rear door of the Township offices. This entrance should be unlocked and available during Council and committee meetings. All Council and committee meetings should be held in an accessible location.

## **USE OF SERVICE ANIMALS AND SUPPORT PERSONS**

Service animals, such as guide dogs, offer independence and security to many people with various disabilities. Some laws generally prohibit animals in certain areas (such as food preparation areas) however service animals are permitted in most public situations.

Support people assist people with disabilities in a variety of ways, by assisting with communication such as an intervener, sign language interpreter, or as a Personal Support Worker providing physical assistance. A support person may also be a friend or relative that will assist and support the customer.

- Every employee shall use reasonable efforts to allow persons with disabilities to use their own assistive devices to access goods and/or services
- Every employee shall allow persons with disabilities to be accompanied by their guide dog or service animal unless the animal is excluded by law. Where an animal is excluded by law from the premises, the reason why the animal is excluded shall be explained to the persons with disabilities. Other reasonable arrangement to provide goods and services shall be explored with the assistance of the person with the disability.
- When a service animal is unruly or disruptive (jumping on people, biting, or other harmful behaviour) an employee may ask the person with the disability to remove the animal from the area or refuse access to goods or services. Other reasonable arrangements to provide goods or services shall be explored with the assistance of the person with the disability.
- Persons with disabilities may be accompanied by their support person while accessing goods and/or services.

## **NOTICE OF DISRUPTION IN SERVICE**

### 1. Temporary Disruption in service

It is possible that from time to time there may be disruptions in service. If a disruption of service is planned, and expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

People with disabilities may often go to a lot of trouble to access services, such as booking transportation or arranging a ride. By providing notice, you can save that person an unnecessary trip.

Notice may be given by posting the information at a conspicuous place on premises owned or operated by the Township of Edwardsburgh/Cardinal, by posting it on the municipality's website or by such other method as is reasonable in the circumstances.

### 2. Unexpected Disruption in Service

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, notice may be provided in a variety of ways and will be done as quickly as possible.

In the event of a service disruption, alternative methods of service may be considered and those impacted by service interruptions shall be informed of any alternative methods.

For any questions or concerns regarding these procedures please contact:

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