

Accessibility Standards for Customer Services- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act: Mandatory training regarding customer service.

It's important to know that training is a legal requirement under the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The act became law in 2005.

Under the act is a regulation, known as Ontario Regulation 429-07, Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, which became law in January 2008. This regulation is about making customer service accessible for people with disabilities. From now on, we'll call the regulation 'the customer service standard,' or just 'the standard' for short.

Training is a key part to this innovative standard. The standard says that you must be trained on serving customers with disabilities if you:

- Deal with the public
- Deal with third parties
- Participate in developing customer service policies, practices, and procedures.

This training must be done as soon as it is reasonable after starting a job or duties in a business or organization. It is also required for volunteers involved in an organization.

You must receive updated training when there are any changes to policies, practices and procedures that relate to customer service for people with disabilities.

Here are the main sections of this training information that is being provided for you. This is taken from : <http://curriculum.org/sae-en/index2.php> an interactive training course on the AODA. You can visit that site on line to participate in that training. This training gives you information about:

1. Purpose of the act
2. Requirements of the customer service standard
3. Serving customers with disabilities
4. Service animals
5. Support persons
6. Assistive devices
7. If there are difficulties accessing your services

Let's start this journey with one of the main reasons you are taking this course: the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005. We'll call it "the act" for short.

The act is a provincial law that allows the government to develop specific standards of accessibility and to enforce them. The goal is to make Ontario accessible by 2025.

The purpose of the Act is to develop, implement, and enforce standards in these areas:

- goods,
- services,
- facilities,
- accommodations,
- employment, and
- buildings,
- structures, and
- premises.

These standards address barriers to people with disabilities in these areas.

How are these standards developed? The standards are developed by committees that include people with disabilities, the provincial government, and representatives of various industries and sectors. People have an opportunity to review and comment on the standard before they are completed. The standards may be adopted as regulations under the act.

Think for a moment about where you travel, live and work — and what these places might look like without barriers. When everyone has access to places, people and experiences we all benefit — in this case we benefit from the contributions, involvement and spending power of people with disabilities.

Greater accessibility will help prepare Ontario for the future. Our population is aging, so the number of people with disabilities will increase.

Some people see disabilities as the barrier to full involvement in life. But, actually, it's the environment that presents barriers. For example, having stereotypes about people with disabilities is a major barrier. There are sometimes physical barriers in the environment. Sometimes certain systems and processes create barriers.

These barriers can be based on certain ideas of what the human experience should be like. So, it is the environment that presents barriers for people with disabilities — not the disabilities.

Purpose of the Accessibility for Ontarians Act

So...now we have a regulation on accessible customer service under the act. What is it? What do you have to do?

The customer service standard is the first standard developed under the act. Other standards are expected to cover

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- information and communications,
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- the built environment. The built environment refers to physical things like the inside and outside of buildings.

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The goal of the standard is for every business and organization to provide service to their customers in a way that is accessible to people customers with all types of disabilities. Sometimes I'll call the businesses and organizations that must comply with the standard "providers" for short.

The customer service standard became law January 1, 2008 . The standard applies to all people and organizations that are designated in the regulation

Or

- provide goods or services to the public or other businesses and organizations (known as third parties) and
- have at least one employee in Ontario.

There are a number of legal requirements under the standard. To comply, businesses and organizations must:

- Set up policies, practices and procedures on providing goods or services to people with disabilities
- Make reasonable efforts to ensure that policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the key principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity
- Have a policy about the use of assistive devices by people with disabilities
- Communicate with a person with a disability in a manner that takes into account his or her disability
- Let people with disabilities bring their service animals onto the parts of the premises open to the public or third parties except in some situations
- Let people with disabilities bring their support persons with them when accessing goods or services
- If your organization charges an admission fee, let people know ahead of time what, if any, admission will be charged for a support person
- Let the public know when facilities or services that people with disabilities usually use to access their goods and services are temporarily not available

- Ensure that staff and volunteers receive training on how to serve people with disabilities, including staff involved in developing customer service policies, practices and procedures and staff who are likely to interact with customers.
- Receive feedback and let people know how feedback will be responded to and what action will be taken on any complaints. Make the information about the feedback process readily available to the public

There are three more things that designated public sector organizations and providers with 20 or more employees must do to comply.

Let's get to the essence of this course: interacting and serving customers with disabilities. You can read and download tip sheets on interacting with people with various disabilities at <http://curriculum.org/sae-en/index2.php>. You may want to keep copies of these tips sheets handy and have them nearby as reminders.

Let's review some scenarios and some suggested ways to interact with people with various disabilities, people using assistive devices, service animals and support persons.

Get ready: this is where you can really learn tips, suggestions and ways to serve customers with disabilities. For everyday customer service, this is the practical information that you'll want to remember.

Here are some things to keep in mind when serving customers with disabilities:

- If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "May I help you?" Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- Speak directly to your customer.
- Not everybody with the same disability experiences the same things. Don't make assumptions about the types of disability a person has. Your customers are not required to tell you about their disabilities.
- Take the time to get to know your customer's needs and focus on meeting those needs just like you would with any other customer. Some disabilities are not visible.
- All customers have a range of needs and preferences and so do your customers with disabilities.
- If you can't understand what your customer is saying, politely ask him or her to repeat it.
- You may want to ask if the information you are conveying needs to be repeated. Ask: "Do you understand this?"
- Exercise patience.

People who experience hearing loss may be Deaf, oral deaf, deafened, or hard of hearing. People experiencing hearing loss may use assistive devices, like hearing aids, special telephones, sign language interpreters, various amplifiers or a pen and paper.

Here are suggested ways to serve customers with hearing loss:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking. For example, try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand.
- Don't shout.
- Make sure you are in a well-lit area where your customer can see your face.
- If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area.

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some degree. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating. Intervenors are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling.

Keep these suggestions in mind when you serve a customer who is deafblind:

- Speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor.
- Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer who is deafblind.
- A customer who is deafblind 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

Customers with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language.
- Make sure your customer understands what you've said. You can be direct and ask: "Do you understand this?"
- Provide one piece of information at a time. You can break down the information into simpler concepts, without exaggerating speech or gestures or being patronizing.
- You may want to ask if the information needs to be repeated

Learning Disabilities

- Take some time — people with some kinds of learning disabilities may take a little longer to process, understand and respond.
- Provide information in a way that works for your customer. For example, keep a pen and paper handy. That way, you can explain, and then review and repeat the information using any additional notes.
- Be prepared to explain any materials you provide for your customers.

Mental health disabilities

- Be confident and reassuring. As with all customers, listen carefully and focus on meeting the customer's needs.
- If the person appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.
- If a customer appears to show signs of a mental health disability, it may be helpful to keep in mind that the customer's reactions are not connected to you personally as a service provider or service agent. The customer is simply showing symptoms of mental illness.

Customers with physical disabilities or disabilities affecting mobility

- Ask before you help. People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things.
- Respect your customer's personal space. Don't lean over them or on an assistive device.
- Don't move items, such as canes and walkers, out of the person's reach.
- If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair remember to make sure your customer is ready to be moved and that you describe what you're going to do beforehand. Don't leave the individual in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.
- In some situations, inform your customer about accessible features in the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators, ramps, etc.).

Customers with speech or language impairments

- Don't assume that just because a person has this disability, they also have another.
- Give your customer whatever time they need to get their point across.
- Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no," if possible.
- Don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences. Wait for them to finish.

Customers with vision disabilities

- Did you know that few people who are blind have no vision? According to CNIB, nine out of ten people who come to CNIB have some degree of vision.
- Three million Canadians have difficulty reading conventional text.
- Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or white cane; others may not. Some customers simply need to view written materials—like documents, receipts, menus, brochures, instructions or labels—in large print, or with the help of a magnifier.

Serving Customers with Vision Loss

- Don't assume the individual can't see you.
- Identify yourself when you approach your customer and speak directly to him or her.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person. If they accept, walk slowly, but wait for permission before doing so.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient your customer to the environment around them.
- If you're giving directions or providing any information, be precise and descriptive. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.
- Don't leave your customer in the middle of a room. Guide them to a chair or a comfortable location. Don't walk away without saying good-bye.

You've probably seen someone with vision loss who uses a guide dog. There are other types of service animals who help people with other disabilities as well.

- Hearing alert animals help people who are Deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing.
- Animals trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.
- Service animals trained to assist people with:
 - Autism,
 - Mental health disabilities
 - Physical disabilities and
 - Other disabilities.

You might recognize service animals when they wear a harness or a sign, or when they are helping someone. Their owner might carry a certificate or a letter from a doctor or nurse that states that the individual requires the use of a service animal because of a disability. You can ask to see such a letter. You might also observe the animal helping someone by opening doors or alerting them to certain sounds.

- The customer is responsible for the care and supervision of the service animal.
- Avoid touching, talking to or making eye contact with the service animal: they are working animals and need to stay focused.
- Some people with disabilities that you encounter will be accompanied by a support person.
- A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend of the person with a disability. 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 regulation, support persons must be allowed to accompany an individual with a disability to any part of your organization that is open to the public or to third parties.
- A customer with a disability might not introduce their support person. If you're not sure which person is the customer, you could take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services or simply ask. ***Once you've determined who your customer is, then speak directly to him or her not to the support person. If you are the support person encourage the other person to talk to the person you are supporting directly.***

- It's also good practice to confirm with your client or customer that they want the support person to be present while confidential matters are being discussed.

Let's talk about assistive devices. Most assistive devices used by people with disabilities are "personal assistive devices" – such as wheelchairs. They belong to the person using them and they are part of that person's personal space.

So, it's generally inappropriate to lean on or reach over them. Also, it wouldn't be a good practice to restrict anyone from moving around by holding onto the person's personal assistive device.

There are many assistive devices that you won't even notice at first glance, such as a hearing aid. And some aren't used all the time, like a speech amplification device or a white cane.

Let's consider for a moment the assistive devices in your operation that may help with the provision of goods or services to customers with disabilities. The standard says that you must be trained on how to use them. Ideally, you should have instruction manuals handy, perhaps a summary instruction sheet.

One of the more common assistive devices is a TTY line.

TTY stands for Teletypewriter, a type of telephone that allows callers to send typed messages to each other across phone lines.

TTY users can directly call other TTY numbers or they can connect with a Relay Service. A standard phone user can also place a call to a TTY user through the Relay operator. You give the operator your name, the name of the person you are calling, and the number you wish to reach. Using the Relay Service locally is free. For long-distance, any standard long-distance charges would apply.

Other Assistive Devices

- Keyboard
- Pen and paper
- Pointing device
- Information in braille
- Automatic door opener
- Hearing and amplification devices
- Examples of other assistive devices that can help you serve your customers would be alternative keyboards for people who have difficulty with conventional ones.
- Or, you might have software that enables people with disabilities to communicate with you using a computer.
- Elevators, escalators and automatic door openers are assistive devices.
- Under the standard, you must provide notification when these services are temporarily not available.

Serving Customers with Disabilities- If there are Difficulties Accessing your Services

- Be flexible
- Ask: "May I Help You?"
- Solicit suggestions
- Offer to communicate via pen and paper
- Retrieve out-of-reach products
- Confirm that needs are met
- Sometimes your customers will have difficulty accessing your services. Most customers have specific needs or preferences. Being positive, flexible and open to suggestions will help to create a good customer experience.
- If you notice that your customer is having difficulty accessing your services, a good starting point is to ask how you can best help them.
- Often, there are simple solutions. For example, your customer is Deaf and doesn't have a sign language interpreter. You could ask him, in writing, if using a pen and paper would be a good way to serve him. Remember, if you're discussing confidential information offer to return the notes to the customer or to destroy them.
- Perhaps your customer can't reach some of the products in your shop because the displays and counters are too high. You could offer to bring the products to him or her.
- If the menus in your restaurant are unreadable to someone with vision loss, you could offer to read the menu aloud.
- Be prepared to help with doors if your business doesn't have automatic door openers.

Resources

<http://curriculum.org/sae-en/resources.php>

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90h19> (Ontario Human Rights Code)