



Guidelines for Delivering Accessible Customer Service at the County of Bruce

This document is available in alternate formats, upon request.

What do we mean when we say Disability?

A disability as defined by the AODA includes:

- Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness
- A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability
- A learning disability or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language
- A mental disorder
- An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997

Accessible customer service can mean many things. Mostly it is the understanding that each individual may need a slightly different type of accommodation for the service we provide.

Some examples of this include:

- A person who is blind may need to have information read aloud to them
- An individual with a learning disability may need to have instructions written down
- Someone who uses a wheelchair may need help in finding an accessible route

Accessible customer service is **good** customer service – courteous, helpful and prompt.

How can I provide excellent service to persons with disabilities?

Always start with people first. In language, that means saying “person with disability” rather than a disabled person. In any interaction, it means addressing the person’s service needs rather than focusing on the disability.

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 or her situation to you, rather than to make your own assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong. Keep in mind that disabilities are not always visible.

Each table below defines a specific category of disability and outlines some best practices and tips to help you provide service to our customers.

Hearing Disabilities:

Definition:

- Hearing loss can cause problems in distinguishing certain frequencies, sounds or words
- Deaf – sever to profound hearing loss
- Hard of Hearing – a person who uses their residual hearing and speech to communicate
- Deafened - caused to hear poorly or not at all

Best Practices and Tips for Serving Customers:

- Attract the customer's attention before speaking – gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand – and say "hello" from outside their personal space
- Look directly at the person
- Speak clearly, keep your hands away from your face
- Reduce background noise
- Ensure appropriate lighting
- Personal matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example, using a pen and paper

Deafblind Disability:

Definition:

- Combination of some degree of hearing and vision loss
- Many will be accompanied by a support person to help them communicate

Best Practices and Tips for Serving Customers:

- Speak directly to your customer, not the support person
- Identify yourself to the support person
- The customer may explain how you should communicate with them
- Understand that communication can take time – be patient

Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities:

Definition:

- Affects a person's ability to think and reason
- Can mildly or profoundly limit ability to learn, communicate, do everyday activities and live independently
- May affect:
 - Understanding spoken and written information
 - Conceptual information
 - Perception of sensory information
 - Memory

Best Practices and Tips for Serving Customers:

- Don't assume what the customer can or cannot do – ask how you can help
- Speak naturally, clearly and directly to the person
- Take time, be patient
- Ask "Do you understand this?"
- Provide one piece of information at a time - step-by-step instruction
- Offer information in simpler concepts

Learning Disabilities:

Definition:

- Affects how person acquires, interprets, retains or takes in information
- May affect:
 - Language based learning
 - Problem solving
 - Time management
 - Mathematics
 - Writing, fine motor skills

Best Practices and Tips for Serving Customers:

- Take 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
- Be prepared to explain any materials you provide
- Allow extra time to complete tasks if necessary

Mental Health Disabilities:

Definition:

- Mental illness is not a single disease but a broad classification for many disorders including:
 - Mood disorders, such as depression and bipolar disorder, which affect how one feels
 - Schizophrenia, which affects how one perceives the world
 - Anxiety disorders, which affect how fearful one perceives places, events or situations to be
 - Personality disorders, which affect how one sees oneself in relation to others
 - Eating disorders, such as anorexia or bulimia, which influence how one feels about food and one's body image

Best Practices and Tips for Serving Customers:

- Be confident and reassuring
- Do not be confrontational
- If the customer is in crisis, ask how best to help
- Take your customer seriously
- Don't take things personally
- Stay calm and courteous, even if the customer exhibits unusual behavior

Speech or Language Disabilities:

Definition:

- Partial or total loss of the ability to speak
- May have problems communicating including:
 - Pronunciation
 - Pitch and loudness
 - Hoarseness or breathlessness
 - Stuttering or slurring
- May use communication boards or other assistive devices

Best Practices and Tips for Serving Customers:

- If possible, communicate in a quiet environment
- Give them time to get their point across – be patient – don't interrupt
- Ask questions that can be answered yes or no, if possible
- May want to use pen and paper
- Say: "I don't understand. Can you repeat that?"

Physical or Disabilities Affecting Mobility:

Definition:

- May restrict a person in the following ways:
 - Control or speed of movements
 - Coordination and balance
 - Ability to grasp some objects
 - Ability to walk long distances
 - Ability to sit or stand for prolonged periods
- Can be present at birth, result from disease, injury or be temporary

Best Practices and Tips for Serving Customers:

- Speak directly to the customer
- Ask before you help
- Respect personal space
- Don't move any items they may have with them
- Describe what you are going to do beforehand
- Don't leave your customer in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position
- Keep ramps and corridors free of clutter
- If a counter is too high or wide, step around it to provide service
- Provide seating for those who cannot stand in line

Vision Disabilities:

Definition:

- Reduces one's ability to see clearly
- Most individuals who are legally blind have some remaining vision – very few are totally blind
- Low or no vision can restrict ability to read signs, locate landmarks, or see hazards
- May use guide dog or white cane
- May need to view written documents in large print, or with the help of a magnifier

Best Practices and Tips for Serving Customers:

- Don't assume the customer can't see you
- Speak directly to your customer
- Offer your elbow to guide – if they accept, walk slowly
- Identify landmarks along the route
- Be precise and descriptive with information
- Don't leave the customer without saying goodbye

Most importantly, if you are nervous, relax. People with disabilities are generally aware they may need some accommodations and will work with you. Just remember to ask how you can help.

How Should I interact with persons with disabilities who use assistive devices, the assistance of a service animal or a support person?

Assistive Equipment:

Definition:

- Devices that people may bring with them or that are already on the premises and are used to assist persons with disabilities in carrying out activities or in accessing the services provided by the County of Bruce
- Assistive devices include, but are not limited to, wheelchairs, walkers, white canes used by people who are blind or have low vision, portable magnifiers, recording machines, assistive listening devices, personal oxygen tanks and devices for grasping.

Do:

- Ensure that the customer is permitted to enter the premises with the device unless excluded by law.
- Remove potential barriers to the use of assistive devices where possible
- Ensure persons with disabilities are aware of assistive devices available on the providers' premises or otherwise supplied by the provider
- Offer assistive devices in a manner that respects the person's dignity and independence

Don't:

- Lean on or reach over a customer or their device

Service Animal:

Definition:

- An animal trained specifically to assist an individual with disabilities. Many times it is readily apparent that the animal is used by a person with a disability for reasons relating to his or her disability. For example a guide dog wearing a harness.
- It is not readily apparent that the animal is a service animal, then a letter is required from a physician or nurse confirming that the person requires the animal for reasons relating to the disability.

Do:

- Allow service animals anywhere customers normally have access
- Permit the customer to keep the service animal with him or her unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises (e.g. areas where food is prepared).
- Leave the care and supervision of the service animal with the customer

Don't:

- Talk to, touch or make eye contact with the service animal

Support Person:

Definition:

- Those who accompany a person with a disability to help with communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs or with access to goods or services
- May be a paid professional, a volunteer, a family member or a friend

Do:

- Permit customers and their support person to enter the premises together
- Provide the person with a disability access to their support person while on the premises
- Obtain consent from the customer if confidential information is going to be shared when a support person is present
- Speak directly to your customer, not the support person

Don't:

- Charge the support person an admission fee or access fee when they are assisting a person with a disability in obtaining, using or benefiting from the County's goods and services

What happens if for some reason we can't serve a person with a disability?

It is possible that from time to time there will be disruptions in service, such as elevators under repair, renovations that limit access to an area, or technology that is temporarily unavailable. If a disruption in service is planned, and expected, it is important to provide reasonable notice.

Customers with disabilities may go to a lot of trouble to access services such as booking specialized transit or arranging for their support person to attend. By providing reasonable notice of service unavailability, you can save the customer an unnecessary trip. Notice may be given by posting the information in visible places at premises owned or operated by the County, on the County's website or by any other method that may be reasonable in the circumstances.

In the event of an unexpected disruption in service, provide notice quickly and in as many ways as possible. The notice must include information about:

- The reason for the disruption
- Its anticipated duration
- Alternative facilities or services, if available

It is important to recognize that there are internal and external resources available to assist you in delivering service to persons with disabilities:

- Review the Accessible Customer Service Policy and the Accessibility Plan at [Bruce County Website](#)
- Review resources available at [Access Ontario Website](#)
- Speak to your Supervisor or Manager
- Bell Relay Service Operators are available to assist in placing or receiving calls to and from persons who use a TTY (telephone typewriter or teletypewriter). There is no charge for local calls. To place a call through the Bell Relay Service call 1-800-855-0511.
- Contact the County of Bruce, Clerk's Office at 519-881-1291

Receiving Feedback and Complaints

The County of Bruce is committed to providing quality goods and services that are accessible to all persons that we serve. Feedback from the public is welcomed as it may identify areas that require change and encourage continuous service improvements.

Feedback from a member of the public about the delivery of goods and services to persons with disabilities may be given by telephone, in person, in writing, in electronic format or through other methods. Use of the County's Customer Service Feedback Form is encouraged.

What is Accessible Customer Service?

The County of Bruce is committed to providing customer service to persons with disabilities in a manner that:

- Respects their dignity and independence
- Is integrated as fully as possible into the method of service delivery
- Ensures reasonable efforts are made to provide an opportunity equal to that offered to other customers to obtain and use our goods and services