



## **Customer Service for Persons with Learning Disabilities**

The **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act**, 2005 (AODA) is legislation that is designed to create an accessible, barrier-free Ontario by 2025. The act calls for the development of standards which will be implemented in stages to give everyone enough time to plan ahead and build accessibility improvements into their normal business plans and practices. Accessibility standards are the rules that businesses and organizations in Ontario will have to follow to identify, remove and prevent barriers to accessibility.

The **Accessibility Standards for Customer Service** became law on January 1, 2008.

Under the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service, all businesses or organizations that provide goods or services to the public or to other third parties in Ontario must do certain things to make sure they are providing accessible customer service to people with various kinds of disabilities, including learning disabilities. Public sector organizations must comply with the standards by January 1, 2010, and other organizations by January 1, 2012.

The standards require organizations to do such things as:

- communicate in a way that takes into account a person's disability
- train staff on how to serve people with disabilities
- set a policy on allowing people to use assistive devices
- allow support persons
- allow service animals (except in some specific situations).
- receive and respond to feedback
- let the public know when their facilities or services (that people with disabilities usually use) are not available
- try to follow four principles when serving people with disabilities: independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity

To read more about the Accessibility Standards for Customer Service:

[www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/ComplyingStandards/index.aspx](http://www.mcsc.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/ComplyingStandards/index.aspx)

## **What does customer service to persons with learning disabilities involve?**

Since persons with learning disabilities (LDs) have unique profiles of strengths and weaknesses, there is no 'one size fits all' approach. Many will have developed coping and compensating strategies, including use of various technologies, and will know what help they need.

The following are some tips that were adapted from **Customer Service Standard for People with Disabilities, Canadian Standards Association, 2002**

For difficulties in understanding conversation or verbal directions:

- Use plain language, with uncomplicated sentence structure.
- Speak clearly, but not loudly or unnaturally slowly, without drawing public attention
- Repeat requests or guidance with altered vocabulary if not understood.
- Use pictures and icons in addition to text for signs.

For difficulties in expressing ideas verbally or in writing:

- Give the person time to express himself /herself.
- Ask the person to repeat himself /herself if you are having difficulty understanding, but do not attempt to finish sentences or anticipate what is being said.
- Take notes of the discussion if requested and ensure that these accurately reflect the important items.

For difficulties in reading, writing, spelling, and calculating:

- Complete written application forms, warranty claims, returned goods reports, etc, on behalf of the person, if requested.
- Read instructions out loud if requested, without drawing public attention.
- Make a calculator available or carry out calculation for the person, explaining steps in the calculation processes, if requested.
- Facilitate the use of speech recognition systems, text-to-speech programs, a word processor and/or spell checker.

For difficulties in remembering and/or carrying out multi-step tasks:

- Offer to give instructions in writing
- Offer to use diagrams or demonstrate the process
- Allow the person to record the conversation or take notes for later use, e.g., for telephone numbers or directions.

For difficulties finding the way to a location:

- Offer to draw a map, or have someone accompany the person to the location.

**Example of a school meeting:**

Some parents of students with learning disabilities (LDs) may have LDs themselves which could affect their participation in school meetings with educators and administrators. For example, in order to remember and go over what took place at a meeting, a parent might want to bring someone to take notes, take notes themselves on a laptop, or ask to record the meeting. It is a good idea to summarize any decisions at the end of the meeting, and ask the parent if there are any points they need clarified.

**Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario**

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