

# Accessible Customer Service for Emergency Responders

## An Emergency Management Ontario E-Learning Utility

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### Tips for Interacting with a Person with Communication Disabilities

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#### Communication

- Ask questions that can be answered “yes” or “no”.
- Try to allow enough time to communicate with the person as they may speak more slowly.
- Don’t interrupt or finish the person’s sentences. Wait for them to finish.
- Ask the person to repeat the information if you don’t understand.
- Keep the person informed of what you are doing and why.
- Some people use a communication device such as a communication board, speech generating device, support person, pen & paper.
- Ask one question at a time and wait for a reply.
- Wait for the person to finish his/her message. Do not guess.
- Speak naturally and clearly, using your normal tone, volume and rate.
- If the person uses a communication board or book:
  - Say, “Please show me how you say “yes”.
  - Say, “Please show me how you say “no”.
  - Say, “Please show me how you communicate.” The person will either demonstrate or show you his/her communication instructions. These instructions are usually on the person’s communication board or on the person’s wheelchair tray if he/she uses one.
  - If the person uses his/her hand to point to items on a board, say the letter, word or picture out loud that he/she selects.
  - If the person uses a way other than pointing, such as an eye gaze to select items on his/her communication board, s/he might want someone to assist you communicating with them.
  - It often helps to write down the items that the person selects so that you can keep track of the message.
  - If the items that a person selects do not make immediate sense, try putting the words together into a sentence.

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### **Behaviour**

- Face the person so that you can pick up on visual clues like the person's body language, facial expressions and gestures.