



Accessibility Training

A guide for staff, volunteers and
individuals representing the town





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What is accessibility?

It simply means giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in everyday life.

What is a disability?

A disability is a physical or mental condition that affects a person's movements, senses or activities. Many people have disabilities like difficulty walking, seeing and hearing, or learning, processing and remembering information.

Did you know that 1.85 million people in Ontario have a disability?

That's 15.5 per cent of Ontario's population and in Oakville, about 30,000 residents. As people in our community get older, there will be more people with disabilities.

The good news is the Town of Oakville is committed to providing accessible programs, services and facilities to help achieve our vision to be the most livable town in Canada.



The AODA

In 2005, the provincial government passed the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA). Its goal is to make Ontario accessible by 2025. The AODA is a provincial law and applies to all organizations in Ontario with one or more employees.

The AODA and the Human Rights Code

The Ontario Human Rights Code (the Code) and the AODA work together to promote equality and accessibility. The Code states that people with disabilities must be free from discrimination where they work, live and receive services, and that their needs must be accommodated.

The AODA has accessibility standards (laws) that help organizations identify and remove barriers. The Code helps guide how these standards are met.

Areas covered by the AODA

The AODA has five accessibility standards that ensure accessibility in key areas of life:

- Customer service
- Information and communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Public spaces

General requirements

In addition to the five standards, the town has to ensure that general requirements are in place:

Accessibility policy

The town's accessibility policy and supporting procedures outline our commitment to eliminating barriers and improving accessibility. They can be found on oakville.ca.

Multi-year plan

The town has a Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, developed in consultation with persons with disabilities. It is our accessibility road map. The plan outlines key actions we will take to meet AODA requirements, how we will prevent and remove barriers, and by when.

The plan is a living document, updated annually to highlight our progress. It can be found on oakville.ca.

Purchasing

It is a requirement that when we purchase goods, services and facilities we include accessibility design, criteria and features. The town has a checklist to help staff address these requirements when making purchases. The checklist can be found on the town's intranet.

Training

This brochure will give you the information you need to plan and meet our accessibility requirements.



Core principles of accessible customer service

- Treat everyone with the same level of respect
- Everyone has value
- Everyone receives the same opportunity
- Consider a person's disability when communicating



Recognizing barriers

Disability itself is not a barrier, but barriers exist that can exclude people. Here are a few examples:

- **Attitudinal:** assuming a person in a wheelchair also has a cognitive or learning disability
- **Information and communication:** only providing a document in print that's too small
- **Physical:** not removing obstacles such as flower pots or boxes at an entrance or pathway
- **Systemic:** policies, practices, laws

At the town, we are committed to eliminating these barriers so people of all abilities can fully participate in everyday life. Be part of this commitment!



Serving people with disabilities

Every time we interact with an individual we leave an impression about the Town of Oakville!

If you are ever unsure of how to interact with a person with a disability, just **TALK**:

T = Take the time to ask: “**How may I help you?**”

A = Ask — don’t assume. See the person first, not the disability

L = Listen attentively and speak directly to the person

K = Know the accommodations and services that are available (we’ll help with that in the next couple of pages)

Providing accessible customer service is good customer service.



Tips to provide excellent customer service

Here are some helpful tips to provide excellent customer service to persons of all abilities:

Physical or mobility related

A person's physical disability may not always be visible or obvious. For example, a person may have difficulty standing for long periods of time.

- Respect personal space, a wheelchair, cane or walker can be an extension of a person
- Ask permission before touching any items or equipment
- Describe what you are going to do before you do it
- Don't leave the individual in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position



Deaf, deafened or hard of hearing

People with hearing loss may have preferred ways to communicate such as sign language, lip reading or pen and paper.

- Attract the person's attention before speaking by looking directly at them, with a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand
- Speak clearly, keeping your hands away from your face
- Direct your attention to the person; if a sign language interpreter is present, try not to be distracted by their presence
- Reduce background noise and ensure proper lighting

Vision loss

Low vision can restrict a person's ability to read signs and see hazards.

- Introduce yourself and speak directly to the person
- Don't assume they can't see you, many people with low vision still have some sight
- If helping an individual to a different area, offer your elbow as guidance. If accepted, walk slowly — lead, don't pull
- Be precise and descriptive with information.
Example: explain when coming to a change in elevation or a turn



Learning

Learning disabilities such as dyslexia, can affect how a person takes in or retains information.

- Take your time, be patient
- Speak clearly and directly using plain language
- Provide information in a way that works for the person. Examples: provide one piece of information at a time, explain materials or use a pen and paper instead of spoken word

Speech and language

Cerebral palsy, stroke, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or express themselves.

- Don't assume. If you don't understand, politely ask again
- Give the person time to get their point across
- Try to ask "yes or no" questions
- Use pen and paper to communicate, if it's helpful

Deafblind

A person who is deafblind may have both hearing and vision loss, or some degree of both.

- Most often accompanied by a support person who will explain how to communicate with the individual
- Speak directly to the individual, not the support person

Developmental

Developmental disabilities such as Down syndrome can mildly or greatly affect a person's ability to learn or communicate.

- Never assume what the person can or cannot do
- Take extra time if needed, be patient
- Speak clearly and directly using plain language
- Provide one piece of information at a time and use simple concepts to explain information

Mental health

Mental health disabilities describes a broad range of mental and emotional conditions which may include depression, acute mood swings, anxiety and hallucinations.

- Treat the individual with the same respect and consideration given to everyone else
- If someone appears to be in distress, ask them the best way you can help
- Respect the individual's personal space

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder may have varying degrees of ability with communication, social interactions and restrictive and/or repetitive patterns of behavior.

- The individual may not make eye contact when communicating, don't assume they are not listening or engaged
- The person may not understand or have awareness of social norms, for example recognizing personal space or speaking out of turn
- If necessary, use visual supports to convey your message, such as gestures, pictures or text



Support persons

A support person is someone who helps an individual with a disability access programs, services and facilities. They can be a paid personal support worker, family member, friend or volunteer.

- If you are not sure which person is the customer, simply ask
- Speak directly to the individual, not their support person

When the town requires a support person to accompany a person with a disability due to health and safety reasons, make sure to discuss it with the individual and find alternatives where possible.

Where admission fees for a support person are applicable, the town must provide advance notice of the fee. If the town requires a support person, the town will waive any fee or fare for the support person.



Tips

- Although most of us like to pet animals, remember it's working and has to pay attention at all times
- If you're not sure the animal is a pet or a service animal, just ask
- The owner is responsible for the animal's care and supervision. However, you can provide water or advise where relieving areas are if the owner requests it

Service animals

Individuals may use service animals for a variety of reasons including support for a physical, psychiatric, intellectual, sensory or other type of disability. Some examples include:

- A person with vision loss may have a guide dog who provides travel assistance, such as getting on a bus or crossing a street
- A person with hearing loss may have a service animal to alert them to household sounds
- Other service animals are trained to identify an oncoming seizure, or to assist people with autism, physical, mental health and other disabilities

How can you tell the difference between a service animal and a pet?

Service animals should be easily identified through visual indicators, such as a harness or vest. If it's not easy to identify, politely ask the person for documentation (from a regulated health professional) that confirms their need for the service animal because of their disability. For a full list, see our Accessible Customer Service procedure on oakville.ca.

It's important to remember the individual is **not** required to disclose their disability or demonstrate how the animal assists them.

Where can service animals go?*

- **Allowed:** all town areas open to the public unless otherwise prohibited by law. If the animal is not allowed by law, let the individual know and discuss alternatives to access town services.
- **Not allowed:** where food is prepared or there is a health and safety risk.

* Only service dogs, not other service animals, are allowed where food is sold and served.



Assistive devices

An assistive device is a piece of equipment used to help people with tasks of daily living such as getting around or reading information. Examples of assistive devices include:

- Wheelchairs, scooters, walkers
- Tablets, phones
- Screen readers
- Voice recognition
- Magnifiers
- Hearing aids
- White canes
- TTY phone lines

Always ask permission to touch or handle any personal assistive device.

Information and communications

We all benefit when information is easy to read or when there are communication supports to assist with reading. Examples of accessible formats can be providing large print, or converting a document into an accessible PDF for a screen reader. Examples of communication supports can be sign language, captioning a video or an assistive device.

Feedback

Whether online, in person or by phone, we are always asking for feedback on our programs, services and projects. When we do, we must ensure that alternate formats or communication supports are offered (some examples noted above) and are available upon request.

Service disruptions

Part of providing accessible customer service is letting the public know when our facilities, programs or services are temporarily unavailable. For example, when an elevator or accessible washroom is out of service.

Some of the ways we provide notice is:

- Town website, social media, digital screens
- Signs posted at the location
- If it is a planned disruption, in local newspapers

When providing notice to the public, always indicate:

- Why there is a disruption
- The anticipated duration of the disruption and
- Any alternatives, if available

The town's Service Disruption Guidelines can be found on oakville.ca.



Employment

The town is dedicated to accessibility in all stages of employment. By proactively removing and preventing barriers through all stages of employment (posting jobs, during recruitment, implementing health and safety programs, and during the return to work process) we help create workplaces that are accessible and allow employees reach their full potential.

Accommodations

The town works with all employees to ensure they have the supports they need. Workplace accommodations help our employees perform the functions of their jobs but do not change performance expectations. The town's Accessible Employment procedure can be found on oakville.ca.



Transportation

Getting around is an important part of daily living. The town provides Oakville Transit (conventional) services, care-A-van (specialized) services and licenses taxis to make it easier for people with disabilities to travel.

Oakville Transit has 100 per cent low-floor ramp-equipped buses, making it easier for everyone to get on and off a bus. Our buses also have automated and preboarding announcements, digital signs with next stop information and are equipped with GPS so people can track their bus in real-time.

The town's Accessible Transportation procedure outlines how we plan for accessibility at bus stops and shelters, provide priority seating on buses, and have equal fares for people with disabilities and their support persons. The procedure can be found on oakville.ca.



Public spaces

Public spaces are outdoor elements and include: recreational trails, outdoor public eating areas like picnic tables, outdoor play spaces, exterior paths of travel like sidewalks and multi-use paths, beach access routes, on-and off-street parking, and indoor service counters. We maintain these areas to ensure accessible amenities are in good working order.

We use provincial and town standards to help ensure that our public spaces are accessible:

- Oakville Universal Design Standards for town facilities
- Design of Public Spaces Standard, AODA
- Ontario Building Code

The requirements apply to new construction or major development. They do not force us to retrofit or renovate.



Let's show our commitment!

Help us welcome people of all abilities to the town where everyone has a chance to participate and enjoy what we have to offer.

Accessibility is everyone's responsibility and we all play a role in making Oakville the most livable town in Canada.

Check out the accessibility page on oakville.ca for the town's initiatives, policies and plans.



Accessibility training

Acknowledgment of completion

Please print

Name:

Job title:

Department/program area (for staff and volunteers):

Company (if applicable):

I have read and understand the training material.

Signature

Date

