



Big Brothers Big Sisters
of South-West Durham and Northumberland

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

Volunteer Training

Introduction

Big Brothers Big Sisters of South West Durham and Northumberland (BBBSSWDN) strive at all times to provide its services in a way that respects the dignity and independence of all people, including people with disabilities. We are also committed to giving people with disabilities the same opportunity to access our services and allowing them to benefit from the same services, in the same place and in a similar way as other existing and prospective volunteers, clients and the general public.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Overview

The province of Ontario has set a goal to make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025. In order to achieve this goal, the province has developed a series of mandatory standards under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (referred to herein as AODA). AODA aims to enforce equal access to services, employment, transportation, information, and buildings for all individuals, with or without disabilities. AODA emphasizes that all individuals must be treated with dignity, independence, and given equal opportunity and integration with persons who are not disabled.

Definition of Disability

The Act uses the same definition of “disability” as the Ontario Human Rights Code, which includes physical disabilities, as well as vision, hearing, speech, developmental, learning and mental health disabilities. A disability can be temporary or permanent.

Principles:

- **Dignity** – provide service in a way that allows the person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of other people.
- **Independence** – a person with a disability is allowed to do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others.
- **Integration** – provide service in a way that allows the person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in the same or similar way as other customers, unless a different way is necessary to enable them to access goods, services or facilities.
- **Equal Opportunity** – provide service to a person with a disability in such a way that they have an equal opportunity to access your goods, services or facilities as what is given to others.

Accessible customer service is about:

- Considering a person's disability when communicating with them
- Not making assumptions about what a person can or cannot do because of their disability
- Inclusion – making everyone feel welcome and included
- Understanding that people with disabilities may have different needs
- Serving customers with disabilities is also about showing sensitivity and respect
- **Use the right words** – Use “disability” not “handicapped”
- Say “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person”
- Avoid sympathetic statements such as victim of, suffers with, confined to a wheelchair, physically challenged, or stricken with a particular illness or disabilities

In order to be in compliance with the AODA, we are required to do the following:

- Clients must be able to use assistive devices to access all services, goods, and resources provided by an organization. Less accessible resources must be modified to allow accessibility.
- Document our policies, practices and procedures for providing accessible customer service. Notify clients that the documents are available.
- Ensure that policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the key principles of independence, dignity, integration and equality of opportunity.
- Communicate with an individual with a disability in a manner that takes into account their disability. Let people with disabilities bring their service animals or support persons with them. Advise people ahead of time if any admission fee will be charged for a support person at events.
- Let the public know when facilities or services that people with disabilities use to access our services are temporarily unavailable.
- Set up a process for receiving and responding to feedback about the manner in which we could provide services to people with disabilities.

For the complete version of the AODA, please visit the following website:

www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11

BBBSSWDN Customer Service Policy

BBBSSWDN is committed to excellence in providing service to individuals, including people with disabilities. Reasonable efforts will be made to provide all persons equal opportunity to obtain, use and benefit from BBBSSWDN services. We will ensure that services are provided in a manner and format that respects the dignity and independence of persons with disabilities.

If you would like to review our AODA Customer Service Policy, please contact your Caseworker or Supervisor.

Interacting with Individuals who have a Disability

The following are tips on how to interact with people with various types of disabilities (Information from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/how-train-your-staff-accessibility>):

People with physical disabilities

Only some people with physical disabilities use a wheelchair. Someone with a spinal cord injury may use crutches while someone with severe arthritis or a heart condition may have difficulty walking longer distances.

Tips:

- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone who uses a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so you can make eye contact at the same level
- Don't touch items or equipment (e.g., canes, wheelchairs) without permission
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors

People with vision loss

Vision loss can restrict someone's ability to read, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some customers may use a guide dog or a white cane, while others may not.

Tips:

- when you know someone has vision loss, don't assume the individual can't see you; many people who have low vision still have some sight
- identify yourself when you approach and speak directly to the customer
- ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them (e.g., a menu or schedule of fees)
- when providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive
- offer your elbow to guide them if needed

People with hearing loss

People who have hearing loss may be deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. They may also be oral deaf – unable to hear, but prefer to talk instead of using sign language. These terms are used to describe different levels of hearing and/or the way a person's hearing was diminished or lost.

Tips:

- once a customer has identified themselves as having hearing loss, make sure you are in a well-lit area where they can see your face and read your lips
- as needed, attract the customer's attention before speaking; try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave of your hand
- if your customer uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area
- if necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (e.g., using a pen and paper)

People who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind may have some degree of both hearing and vision loss. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional support person who helps with communication.

Tips:

- A customer who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them, perhaps with an assistance card or a note
- speak directly to your customer, not to the intervenor

People with speech or language impairments

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult for a person to pronounce words or may cause slurring. Some people who have severe difficulties may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

Tips:

- don't assume that a person with a speech impairment also has another disability
- whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with "yes" or a "no"
- be patient; don't interrupt or finish your customer's sentences

People who have learning disabilities

The term "learning disabilities" refers to a variety of disorders. One example is dyslexia, which affects how a person takes in or retains information. This disability may become apparent when a person has difficulty reading material or understanding the information you are providing.

Tips:

- be patient – people with some learning disabilities may take a little longer to process information, to understand and to respond
- try to provide information in a way that takes into account the customer's disability; for example, some people with learning disabilities find written words difficult to understand, while others may have problems with numbers and math

People who have intellectual/developmental disabilities

Developmental or intellectual disabilities, such as Down Syndrome, can limit a person's ability to learn, communicate, do every day physical activities and live independently. You may not know that someone has this disability unless you are told.

Tips:

- don't make assumptions about what a person can do
- use plain language
- provide one piece of information at a time

People who have mental health disabilities

Mental health issues can affect a person's ability to think clearly, concentrate or remember things. Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. For example, some customers may experience anxiety due to hallucinations, mood swings, phobias or panic disorder.

Tips:

- if you sense or know that a customer has a mental health disability be sure to treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else
- be confident, calm and reassuring
- if a customer appears to be in crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help

People who use assistive devices

An assistive device is a piece of equipment a person with a disability uses to help them with daily living (e.g., a wheelchair, screen reader, hearing aid, cane or walker, an oxygen tank).

Tips:

- don't touch or handle any assistive device without permission
- don't move assistive devices or equipment (e.g., canes, walkers) out of your customer's reach
- let your customers know about accessible features in the immediate environment that are appropriate to their needs (e.g. public phones with TTY service, accessible washrooms)

Some examples of assistive devices that your organization might offer include:

- lift, which raises or lowers people who use mobility devices
- accessible interactive kiosk, which might offer information or services in braille or through audio headsets
- wheelchairs

People who use service animals

There are various types of service animals who support people with various types of disabilities. People with vision loss may use a guide dog. Hearing alert animals help people who are deaf, deafened, oral deaf, or hard of hearing. Other service animals are trained to alert an individual to an oncoming seizure.

The law requires you to allow service animals on the parts of your premises that are open to the public. In cases where the law prohibits them (e.g.: a service animal would not be allowed in the kitchen of a cooking school), provide another way for the person to access your goods and services.

Tips:

- avoid touching or addressing a service animal (it is not a pet, it is a working animal)
- if you're not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask your customer

People with a support person

A support person, such as an intervenor, may accompany some people with disabilities. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or a friend. A support person might help your customer with a variety of things, such as communication, mobility, personal care or medical needs.

Tips:

- if you're not sure which person is the customer, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services, or simply ask
- speak directly to your customer, not to their support person

Temporary Service Disruption to BBSSWDN services

BBSSWDN will notify clients promptly in the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to services or facilities for clients with disabilities including: access to the office, the agency phone service or the agency internet service.

This clearly posted notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length of time and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available. The notice will be placed on all other alternate forms of contact for our clients including at the front door of the office, on the agency's automated telephone system and on the agency's website.

Ontario Human Rights Code

The Ontario Human Rights Code provides for equal rights and opportunities, and freedom from discrimination. Please refer to the following online brochure for more information regarding the Ontario Human Rights Code as it relates to people with disabilities:

http://www.ohrc.on.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/Disability_and_human_rights.pdf

Service Access Issues

If you notice that someone with a disability is having difficulty accessing any services provided by BBSSWDN, please ask the individual how you may help.

If there is a concern regarding an accessibility issue, please contact the Executive Director using any form of communication. Existing and prospective volunteers, clients and the general public can expect to hear back in 10 working days.