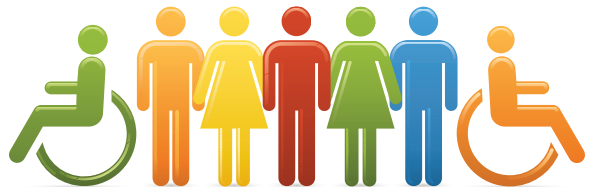


A Guide to Providing Accessible Service



Building an Inclusive & Accessible
McMaster Community

General AODA & Customer Service

McMaster University is committed to creating and maintaining an accessible environment for all students, employees and visitors. In order to achieve this, the University is working to remove barriers which might prevent persons with disabilities from receiving the full complement of services offered by McMaster in a respectful and dignified manner.

The AODA Customer Service Standard

This document contains information and tips on how to best provide accessible service at McMaster University. It was prepared in accordance with the Customer Service standard of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005) which came into force in 2010.

Proper terminology

- Use **“person with a disability”** instead of “disabled person”
- Use **“disability”** – not “handicap”



Principles of Accessible Service

As part of McMaster's initiatives to improve accessibility on campus, people interacting with persons with disabilities on behalf of the University are asked to keep in mind the four core principles of accessible service:

- Honoring someone's **Independence** means recognizing when a person is able to do things on his or her own without unnecessary help or interference from others.
- Showing consideration for someone's **Dignity** means providing service in a way that allows the individual to maintain self-respect and the respect of other persons.
- We aim for **Integration** so that service can be provided in a way that allows all individuals to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in the same or similar way as others, unless an alternate measure is necessary.
- We strive for **Equality** by providing service to individuals in such a way that they have an opportunity to access goods or services equal to that given to others.

Tips on providing accessible service to persons with various types of disabilities

Communication Disabilities

A person with a speech disability is unable to produce speech sounds correctly or fluently. A person with a language disability sometimes has trouble understanding others or sharing thoughts and feelings of their own.

If you are having difficulty understanding the person...

- Do not assume that this person has an intellectual/developmental disability just because they are having trouble communicating
- Try to eliminate background noise and other distractions so you can concentrate on the conversation
- Ask one question at a time and do not interrupt them when they are speaking
- Face the person so that you can pick up on visual signs – body language, facial expressions, gestures
- Try to ask 'yes' or 'no' questions
- Be honest! - Tell the person if you do not understand what they're saying
- Speak in a regular tone
- Offer them a pen and paper if needed

If the person is having difficulty understanding you...

- Use clear, straightforward language – avoid unnecessary words, jargon, technical terms & ambiguous sentences
- Slow the interaction – pause between sentences

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities.

- When meeting persons who use a wheelchair or walker, offer to shake their hands even if it may appear that they have limited use of their hands
- Do not make assumptions about a person's capabilities; ask before providing your help.
- Never move someone's wheelchair, cane, walker, etc. without their permission; if given permission never put them out of reach of the person
- If given permission to assist a person in a wheelchair: wait for their instructions, confirm that they are ready to move, describe what you're going to do before you do it and avoid moving them into an awkward spot – such as facing a wall or in a high traffic area
- Try to sit down when having longer conversations with someone in a wheelchair or a scooter so that they do not have to strain their neck to meet your eye line
- Offer preferential seating

Vision Loss

Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly, but few people with vision loss are totally blind.

- Do not assume a visually impaired person cannot see you
- To get their attention, address them directly & announce yourself – do not touch the person
- Ask them what format they would like to receive information in
- When offering them printed information, offer to summarize it

- When guiding someone, stand on the side they direct you to, offer your elbow & provide clear, accurate directions (do not point or use vague phrases such as “over there”)
- When leaving a person, do not leave them in the middle of a room, direct them to a chair or other comfortable location, and announce that you are leaving them

Hearing Loss

Hearing loss can refer to several different disabilities. People could be ‘hard of hearing’, ‘deafened’, ‘deaf’ or ‘oral deaf’. Persons with hearing loss may or may not use sign language, hearing devices and/or speech-reading (also known as lip reading).

- Ensure you have their attention before speaking – discreetly wave at them or tap them on the shoulder if needed
- Try to find a quiet place to converse
- Always face the person you are speaking to, to enable lip reading; also, do not stand in front of a window or light, and do not block your face with objects like a pen, or glasses, when speaking
- If they are accompanied by an interpreter, speak directly to the person and not their interpreter
- Speak clearly, and pace your speech normally – do not shout or over-pronounce things; offer to communicate using a pen & paper if needed

Deafblind

People who are deafblind have a combination of vision and hearing loss.

- Do not assume what a person is capable and incapable of; some persons who are deafblind have some vision and hearing
- Ask the person what will help you to communicate; in many cases, they may hand you a pre-prepared assistance card with clear directions
- Address the person with the disability directly even if they are accompanied by an intervenor
- Do not suddenly touch a person who is deafblind unless it is an emergency

Mental Health Disabilities

Mental health disabilities affect the way people perceive the world and cope with stressors.

- Be patient and respectful – they may experience mood swings, poor memory, lack of motivation or have a difficulty focusing on what's at hand
- If the person is in crisis, you can call one of the following emergency numbers:

Campus Emergency Services:

(McMaster) ext 88 or call 905-522-4135

McMaster HSC:

(McMaster) ext 5555 or call 905-521-2100

Henderson/General/JCC:

(McMaster) ext 5555 or call 905-521-2100

St Joseph's Hospital/Mountain campus/ Ambulatory Care/Charleton campus:

(McMaster) ext 7777 or call 905-522-1155

St Peter's Hospital:

(McMaster) ext 7777 or call 905-777-3837

Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

Intellectual or developmental disabilities refer to significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviours.

- Treat these persons with respect and dignity, as you would any other individual
- Speak slowly, using plain language and remain patient
- Provide one or small amounts of information at a time
- Do not be afraid to ask "Does this make sense?"

Learning Disabilities

A learning disability is a disorder in the way someone processes information. This kind of disability can affect how a person acquires, organizes, expresses, retains and understands verbal and non-verbal information.

- Ask the person how they would like to receive information
- Be patient and willing to explain things more than once
- Allot them extra time to complete a task

Tips for providing accessible service when Service Animals are present

- Do not pet or offer food to a service animal – they must pay attention at all times
- Do not request a person to leave the animal in a different location

- Not all service animals wear special harnesses or collars; if you are not sure, ask the person if it is a service animal

Tips for providing accessible service when Support Persons are present

- Do not be afraid to ask if it is not clear who the support person is
- Speak directly to the person with a disability, and not her or his support person
- Avoid engaging in separate conversations with support persons, as they are working
- When planning an event and you are aware that support persons may attend reserve extra space, have extra print or other materials ready, etc.

Tips for providing accessible service for persons with Assistive Devices

Some examples of assistive devices include: wheelchairs, scooters, digital audio players, teletypewriters (TTY), white canes, oxygen tanks, personal digital assistants, voice-output systems and communications boards.

- An assistive device is that person's property – touch only if asked to, and never move it out of reach of the person
- Become familiar with any assistive devices your area might offer or whom to contact regarding help with them

Communication Board or Book

- Ask how they say “yes” and “no”, and generally ask them to show you how they communicate
- When the person points to items on the board say what they are referring to out loud
- Write down the items the person has selected so you can keep track of the message

Speech Generating Devices

- Stand or sit in front of the person
- Do not interrupt - wait for the person to construct their full message
- Let the person know if you cannot understand the synthesized speech

Special Situations

Telephone communication

- Find out how a person wants to communicate with you on the phone; they may want to use a device or communication assistant, email, fax or simply have to answer only “yes/no” questions while speaking to you
- If communication becomes very difficult, try to make arrangements to meet using alternate methods (e.g. support person)

Obtaining signatures

People who cannot write but understand and consent to a document for signing, may sign using:

- Just an “X” as a signature
- A stamp
- A thumb-print
- Their authorization of a legally-appointed person to sign on their behalf

Privacy & Confidentiality

It is important to remember that while a person with a disability may rely on a support person for help with daily processes, they may not want to share private personal information with that person. It is recommended that you seek clarification and consent on this prior to communicating sensitive or confidential information.

Emergency Situations

When assisting someone with a disability in an emergency:

- Give clear instructions of what you are going to do
 - whether it is assisting them out of a building, calling someone for help, etc.
- Use “yes” or “no” questions to obtain information quickly

**This reference guide was made possible
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- McMaster Students Union
- McMaster Accessibility Council (MAC)
- Human Resource Services
- Human Rights & Equity Services
- Centre for Student Development
- Media Production Services

For more information on the AODA and Accessibility
measures at McMaster, please visit

www.mcmaster.ca/accessibility/