

Customer Service Training

Providing Goods and Services to People with Disabilities

All staff and volunteers must be trained on the AODA (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act) and sign off that they have read and understand the material. It is vital that staff and volunteers who work with The Literacy Group, understand how to interact appropriately with people and customers with different disabilities.

## Purpose of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005** (or “the Act”) is a provincial law.

The goal is to make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025.

The accessibility standards are the legal requirements that all organizations in Ontario must follow to become more accessible to people with disabilities. The standards address key areas of daily life, including:

* Customer service
* Information and communications
* Employment
* Transportation
* Design of public spaces.

## The Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation which was established under the Act.

**The Human Rights Code and the AODA**

Under the **Human Rights Code**, when a person with a disability needs accommodation, the organization has a duty to accommodate. There are no set instructions for accommodating people with disabilities. However, **consideration** of individual needs is required each time a person asks to be accommodated. Organizations may need to provide an individualized response to an accommodation request. As a small Non for Profit organization this applies to the Literacy Group. Consideration is required from both staff and volunteers.

The AODA sets accessibility standards which must be met by all businesses and organizations that have one or more employees.

## Definition of Disability

**1 in 7 people in Ontario has a disability. That is almost 2 million Ontarians. By 2036, that number will rise to 1 in 5 as people age.**

The Act uses the same definition of “disability” as the Ontario Human Rights Code. A disability can include:

* physical disabilities
* vision
* hearing
* speech
* developmental
* learning
* mental health disabilities.

A disability can be temporary or permanent. Both need to be considered equally.

## The four guiding principles set by the AODA

**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 clients/learners, unless a different way is necessary to enable them to access goods, services or facilities.:

**Equal Opportunities.** This means having the same chances, options, benefits and results as others. In the case of services it means that people with disabilities have the same opportunity to benefit from the way you provide goods or services as others. They should not have to make significantly more effort to access or obtain service. They should also not have to accept lesser quality or more inconvenience.

## Steps to be considerate and accommodating

To show full consideration and accommodation, follow these steps when working with a client/learner. It is important that a client/learner may or may not identify as having a disability, so it is important to follow these steps with all clients/learners.

1. Consider a client/learner’s disability when communicating with them.
2. Allow assistive devices and provide information on using available devices.
3. Allow service animals.
4. Welcome support persons, making sure you do not communicate through them to the client/learner
5. Inform clients/learners when accessible services are temporarily unavailable.
6. Invite, welcome and respect client/learner feedback.

## Key to being considerate

* Always consider a client/learner’s disability when communicating with them.
* Do not make assumptions about what a client/learner can or cannot do because of their disability.
* Make everyone feel welcome and included.
* Understand that people with disabilities may have different needs.
* Serve clients/learners with disabilities is also about showing sensitivity and respect this doesn’t make sense
* Use “disability” not “handicapped” and be aware of the terms the client/learner uses
* Say “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person”
* Avoid sympathetic statements such as
  + *victim of*
  + *suffers with*
  + *confined to a wheelchair*
  + *physically challenged*
  + *stricken with a particular illness or disabilities*Being considerate of people with physical/mobility 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 on being considerate

* Ask before you help; people with disabilities often have their own way of doing things

Consider sitting whilst talking with a person with a disability so you can make eye contact at the same level. Do not assume they need to sit down but make chairs accessible.

* Don’t touch support items or equipment 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

* Think ahead and remove any items that may cause a physical barrier, such as things left in an aisle.

## Being considerate of people with vision loss

Vision loss has many definitions, a client may have restricted vision to total blindness. This disability may restrict a clients/learner’s ability to read, locate our offices or classrooms or see hazards such as chairs or steps.

## Tips on being considerate

* 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 client/learner you’re your regular normal volume and pace
* Ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them and be prepared to more suitably print any documentation such as larger print or on a different coloured paper.
* When providing directions or instructions, be precise and descriptive
* Offer your elbow to guide them if needed. If they accept, lead – don’t pull
* If you need to leave the client/learner, let them know by telling them you’ll be back, or saying goodbye
* Don’t leave the client/customer in the middle of the room – guide them to a comfortable location

## Being considerate of people with hearing loss

People who have hearing loss or diminishment 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.

## Tips on being considerate

* 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
* Gain consent from the client/learner if you may touch their shoulder or elbow should you need to, whilst communicating, or to attract the customer’s attention before speaking.
* If the client/learner uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area such as a vacant tutor room or office.
* Be prepared to offer another method of communicating such as a pen and paper or a blank Word document.
* If a client/learner is using a support worker, always speak directly to the client/learner and not their aid.

## Being considerate of people who are deafblind

A person who is deafblind lives with both hearing and vision loss/diminishment. People who are deafblind could be accompanied by professional support person who helps with communication.

## Tips on being considerate

* Listen closely and learn how a client/learner who is deafblind prefers to communicate
* Speak directly to the client/learner and not to the support person

## Being considerate of people with speech or language disabilities

Disorders or events in their life such as cerebral palsy or having a stroke may leave a client/learner with difficulties pronouncing words or expressing themselves. Clients with this disability may use a communication board or other assistive devices.

## Tips on being considerate

* Don’t assume that a person who has difficulty speaking doesn’t understand you
* Whenever possible, ask questions that can be answered with “yes” or a “no”
* Read visible instructions for communication devices, if the person uses one
* Be patient; don’t interrupt or finish your customer’s sentences
* Confirm what the person has said by summarizing or repeating – don’t pretend if you’re not sure
* Speak directly to the customer and not to their companion or support person

## Being considerate of people who have learning disabilities

The Literacy Group supports adults who are likely to have some sort of learning disability or learning difficulty.

**Learning Disability** – a processing problem can interfere with learning basic skills such as reading, writing and/or math. In addition, time management and coping skills can be interfered with. An example of this is Dyslexia.

**Learning Disorder** – a inability to access and retain information. This could include not having the skills or tools to learn.

## Tips on being considerate

**These tips cover the very basics of primary communication with the client/learner. If you are required to work with the client/learner in an academic format, then you must take the training provided by TLG.**

* Be patient when giving instructions – 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 works for the client/learner. Be prepared to work with visual tools such as pictures, physically showing what you are talking about or through written instruction
* Be willing to rephrase or explain something again in another way

## Being considerate of people who have developmental disabilities

There is a high chance that clients/learners seeking support from The Literacy Group may have a developmental disability. These disabilities can be physical or mental and in some cases unseen on primary discussion. The client/learner’s disability can mildly or profoundly limit their ability to learn, communicate, do everyday physical activities and live independently.

## Tips on being considerate

* Don’t make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do
* Use plain language and provide one piece of information at a time
* Ask the client/learner if they need help reading any material or completing any forms/agreements

## Being considerate of people who have mental health disabilities

Mental health disability defines many disorders that can range in severity. It can affect a person’s ability to:

* think clearly
* communicate
* control their emotions
* concentrate or remember things

A person with a mental health disability may experience:

* depression
* acute mood swings
* anxiety due to phobias
* panic disorder
* hallucinations

You may not know someone has a mental health disability unless you are told.

## Tips on being considerate

* If you sense or know that a client/learner has a mental health disability, treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else
* Be confident, calm and reassuring
* Respect the client/learner’s personal space
* Limit distractions that could affect your client/learner’s ability to focus or concentrate – loud noise, crowded areas and interruptions could cause stress
* Be aware of where the client/learner has been referred from, there may be information or a contact to support you

## Being considerate of 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 on being considerate

* Don’t touch or handle any assistive device without permission
* Don’t move assistive devices or equipment (e.g., canes, walkers) out of the client/learner’s reach
* Let your client/learner know about accessible features in the immediate environment that appropriate to their needs. At The Literacy Group, these include:
  + Accessible washrooms on the fourth floor
  + Elevator
  + Ability to present forms and agreements in larger print or on different coloured paper
  + Having a staff member complete forms for them
  + Orthopedic supportive chair

## Being considerate of people who use service animals

There are various types of service animals who support people with various types of disabilities. It is important that in The Literacy Group any service animal is accepted. These include, but are not limited to:

* Vision loss guide dog
* Hearing alert animals help people with hearing loss.
* Specialized service animals trained to alert a person to an oncoming seizure or to help people with autism, mental health disabilities, physical disabilities and other disabilities

A Service Animal is defined if it can be readily identified by visual indicators such as a vest or harness worn by the animal; or the person provides documentation from a regulated health professional confirming that they need the animal for reasons relating to their disability.

The law requires The Literacy Group to allow service animals on parts of its premises. In cases where another law prohibits a service animal from entering certain areas (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, services or facilities. While service animals may be prohibited from certain areas, service dogs are allowed in areas where food is sold, served or offered for sale.

## Tips on being considerate

* Don’t touch or distract a service animal. It is a working animal and has to pay attention at all times
* If you’re not sure if the animal is a pet or a service animal, ask the client/learner
* You can provide water for the service animal if the client/learner requests it, but the client/learner is responsible for the care and supervision of the animal
* If the client/learner attempts to take the animal into the kitchen at The Literacy Group, explain why this is not prohibited and discuss other means to help them and ensure the animals safety and easy re-access.

## Being considerate of people with a support person

A support person may accompany some people with disabilities. A support person can be a paid

personal support worker, an intervenor, a volunteer, a family member or a friend.

A support person might help your customer with communication, mobility, personal care or with accessing your services.

Support people are to be welcomed at The Literacy Group and are permitted to any place on the premises that are open to the public. During any entry fee based event run by The Literacy Group, the support worker is not to be charged if the support is required for the following reasons:

* A support person is necessary to protect the health or safety of the client/learner with a disability or the health or safety of others on the premises.
* There is no other reasonable way to protect the health or safety of the client/learner with a disability and that of others on the premises

## Tips on being considerate

* If you’re not sure which person is the client/learner take your lead from the person using or requesting The Literacy Group’s services, or simply ask
* Speak directly to your client/learner, not to their support person

## Being considerate of people accessing equipment, services or facilities of The Literacy Group

If you notice that a client/learner is having difficulty accessing your equipment services or facilities, always ask “How can I help you?”

Remember, the client/learner is always the best source of finding out the best way you can help them

Solutions must be:

* Considerate of the individual
* Informed
* Flexible and open to suggestion
* Regulatory abiding

**Disability and Human Rights *(Brochure 2016)***

**Ontario’s Human Rights Code**

The Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the *Code*) provides for equal rights and opportunities, and freedom from discrimination. The *Code* recognizes the dignity and worth of every person in Ontario. It applies to the areas of employment, housing, facilities and services, contracts, and membership in unions, trade or professional associations.

At work, employees with disabilities are entitled to the same opportunities and benefits as people without disabilities. In some cases, they may need special arrangements or “accommodations” so they can do their job duties.

Customers, clients and tenants with disabilities also have the right to equal treatment and equal access to facilities and services. Examples of facilities and services are restaurants, shops, hotels and movie theatres, as well as apartment buildings, transit and other public places.

Public and private education providers must also make sure their facilities and services are accessible, and that students with disabilities are accommodated.

## What is disability?

“Disability” covers a broad range and degree of conditions, some visible and some not visible. A

disability may have been present from birth, caused by an accident, or developed over time. There are physical, mental and learning disabilities, mental disorders, hearing or vision disabilities, epilepsy, drug and alcohol dependencies, environmental sensitivities, and other conditions.

The *Code* protects people from discrimination because of past, present and perceived disabilities. For example, the *Code* protects a person who faces discrimination because she is a recovered alcoholic. So is a person whose condition does not limit their workplace abilities, but who is believed to be at greater risk of being able to do less in the future.

## Removing barriers and designing inclusively

Persons with disabilities face many kinds of barriers every day. These can be physical, attitudinal or systemic. It is best to identify and remove barriers voluntarily instead of waiting to answer individual accommodation requests or complaints.

Identifying and removing barriers also makes good business sense. As well as meeting the needs of clients/learners or employees with disabilities, removing barriers can also help other people, such as older persons and families with young children.

Employers, unions, landlords and service providers can start by doing an accessibility review of their facilities, services and procedures to see what barriers exist. You can then make an accessibility plan and begin to remove the barriers.

It is also helpful to create an accessibility policy and a complaints procedure. These steps will help you remove existing barriers and avoid making new ones. The best way to prevent barriers is to design inclusively. This means that when planning new facilities, renovating, buying computer systems or other equipment, launching websites, setting up policies and procedures, or offering new services, make sure your choices avoid creating new barriers for people with disabilities.

Barriers aren’t just physical. Taking steps to prevent “ableism” – attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities – will help promote respect and dignity, and help people with disabilities to fully take part in community life.

## The duty to accommodate

Even when facilities and services are designed as inclusively as possible, you may still need to

accommodate the individual needs of some people with disabilities. Under the *Code*, unions, landlords and service providers have a legal “duty to accommodate” persons with disabilities. The goal of accommodation is to allow people with disabilities to equally benefit from and take part in services, housing or the workplace.

Accommodation is a shared responsibility. Everyone involved, including the person asking for

accommodation, should work together, exchange relevant information, and look for accommodation solutions together.

There is no set formula for accommodating people with disabilities. Even though some accommodations can benefit many people, you still need to consider individual needs each time a person asks to be accommodated. A solution for one person may not work for someone else.

Some examples of accommodations include:

* Increased flexibility in work hours or break times
* Providing reading materials in alternative formats including digitized text, Braille or large print
* Providing sign language interpreters or real-time captioning for persons who are deaf, deafened or hard
* of hearing so they can take part in meetings
* Putting in automatic entry doors and making washrooms accessible in the workplace or the common areas of a condominium
* In some cases, changing job duties, retraining or assigning a person to another job

Many accommodations can be made easily, and at low cost. In some cases, putting the best solution in place right away may result in “undue hardship” because of costs or health and safety factors. Even if this happens, you still have a duty to look at and take next-best steps that would not result in undue hardship. Such steps should be taken only until more ideal solutions can be put in place or phased in.

## Accommodation responsibilities

## As a person with a disability:

* Tell your employer, union, landlord or service provider what your disability-related needs are related to your job duties, tenancy or the services being provided
* Provide supporting information about your disability-related needs, including medical or other expert opinions where needed
* Take part in looking at possible accommodation solutions

## As an employer, union, landlord or service provider:

* Accept requests for accommodation from employees, tenants and clients in good faith
* Ask only for information that you need to provide the accommodation. For example, you would need to know that an employee’s loss of vision prevents them from using printed material, but you do not need to know they have diabetes
* Take an active role in looking at accommodation solutions that meet individual needs
* Deal with accommodation requests as quickly as possible, even if it means creating a temporary solution
* while you develop a long-term one
* Respect the dignity of the person asking for accommodation, and keep information confidential
* Cover the costs of accommodations, including any required medical information or documentation (for example, doctors’ notes, assessments, letters setting out accommodation needs, etc.)

## For more information

Consult the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s *Policy on ableism and discrimination based on*

*disability* and the *Policy on preventing discrimination based on mental health disabilities and*

*addictions* for more information. See also *Human Rights at Work*.

To file a complaint – called an application – contact the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario at:

Toll Free: 1-866-598-0322

TTY Toll Free: 1-866-607-1240

Website: www.hrto.ca