



## Accessible Mainstreet – Tipsheet

# Tips On Serving Customers Who Are Deaf, Deafened Or Hard Of Hearing

Everyone is different in some way. Each of us has a different way of doing things and there are some things we can't do without some help from people, or from machines and products that are easy to use.

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. Remember, customers who are deaf or hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating.

Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- ❖ Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- ❖ Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- ❖ Attract the customer's attention before speaking. The best way is a gentle touch on the shoulder or gently waving your hand.
- ❖ Make sure you are in a well-lighted area where your customer can see your face.
- ❖ Look at and speak directly to your customer. Address your customer, not their interpreter.
- ❖ If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier, for example a pen and paper.
- ❖ Don't put your hands in front of your face when speaking your customer may be trying to read your lips.
- ❖ Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- ❖ Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- ❖ Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing.
- ❖ Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).

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- ❖ If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.
- ❖ Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

**Additional Tipsheets can be found at:**  
[www.toronto-bia.com/resources/tipsheets.php](http://www.toronto-bia.com/resources/tipsheets.php)

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*Based on: "May I Help You?" – Welcoming Customers with Disabilities" Resource Package, Accessibility Directorate of Ontario, Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2005*