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Accessible Mainstreet – Tipsheet

What You Need To Know About Customers Who Are Deaf-Blind

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.

A deaf-blind person cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deaf-blind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating.

Intervenors are trained in special sign language that involves touching the hands of the client in a two-hand, manual alphabet or finger spelling, and may guide and interpret for their client.

Here are some tips on serving customers who are deaf-blind:

- ❖ Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- ❖ Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- ❖ A deaf-blind customer is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with them.
- ❖ Speak directly to your customer as you normally would, not to the intervenor.
- ❖ Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach your customer who is deaf-blind.
- ❖ Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- ❖ Never touch a deaf-blind person suddenly or without permission unless it's an emergency.
- ❖ Every business should have emergency procedures for customers with disabilities. Make sure you know what they are.

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Additional Tipsheets can be found at:
www.toronto-bia.com/resources/tipsheets.php

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