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Accessible Mainstreet – Tipsheet

How to Welcome Customers with Disabilities

Did you know that just over 13.5% of Ontarians have a disability? That's over 1 in every 8 Ontarians and as the population ages that number will grow.

People with disabilities travel, shop and do business in your community with their friends and families, just like everyone else. By providing service that welcomes people with disabilities, you can offer better service to everyone. Treating all your customers with individual respect and courtesy is at the heart of excellent customer service.

You can broaden your customer base by welcoming everyone to your store, restaurant or services, including customers with disabilities. By learning how to serve people with disabilities, you can attract more customers and improve your service to everyone.

Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.

Here are some ways you can provide better service to your customers with disabilities:

- ❖ Patience, optimism, and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- ❖ Smile, relax, and keep in mind that people with disabilities are just people.
- ❖ Don't make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has.
- ❖ Some disabilities are not visible. Take the time to get to know your customers' needs.
- ❖ Be patient. People with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- ❖ If you're not sure what to do, ask your customer, "May I help you?"
- ❖ If you can't understand what someone is saying, just politely ask again.
- ❖ Ask before you offer to help — don't just jump in. Your customers with disabilities know if they need help and how you can provide it.
- ❖ Find a good way to communicate. A good start is to listen carefully.

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- ❖ Look at your customer, but don't stare. Speak directly to people with disabilities, not to their interpreter or someone who is with them.
- ❖ Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- ❖ Don't touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- ❖ Ask permission before touching a wheelchair or a piece of equipment.
- ❖ 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

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