

Accessibility at the TDSB: A Training Guide on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment which actively promotes and supports human rights and accessibility for people with disabilities.

Table of Contents

A Training Guide on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)	3
Integrated Accessibility Standards (O. Reg. 191/11):	3
Accessibility Standards and the Human Rights Code	3
Barriers to Accessibility	3
Integrated Accessibility Standards	4
Information & Communication	4
Employment	5
Transportation	5
Design of Public Spaces	5
Customer Service	5
How to Help, Interact and Communicate with Persons with Disabilities	6
Vision Loss	6
Deaf, Oral Deaf, Deafened or Hard of Hearing	7
Deafblind	8
Physical Disabilities	8
Invisible (or Non-Visible) Disabilities	9
Mental Health Disabilities	9
Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities	10
Learning Disabilities	10
Speech or Language Impairments	11
Interacting with a Person with a Service Animal	12
Interacting with a Person who has a Support Person	12
Get Training on Assistive Devices	13
Provide Notices of Disruption in Service and Facilities	13
Resources	13
Contact Us	13

A Training Guide on the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (AODA) sets out a process for developing, implementing, and enforcing accessibility standards. Ontario's accessibility requirements are consolidated in the Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation (IASR), O. Reg. 191/11, which includes standards for Customer Service, Information and Communications, Employment, Transportation, and Design of Public Spaces.

Integrated Accessibility Standards (O. Reg. 191/11):

- Customer Service
- Information & Communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Design of Public Spaces

Accessibility Standards and the Human Rights Code

The Human Rights Code (Code) promotes and protects the rights of people with disabilities to be free from discrimination because of disability or perceived disability. The Code and the AODA work together to support persons with disabilities.

“Disability” covers a broad range and degree of conditions, including physical, mental and learning disabilities. Under the Code, the needs of persons with disabilities must be accommodated in a manner that respects their dignity, to the point of undue hardship.

Barriers to Accessibility

Barriers, whether visible or invisible, keep people with disabilities from fully participating in activities that most of us take for granted. Accessibility standards address issues that pose major barriers for people with disabilities. Barriers could be:

- Physical
- Architectural
- Information or communication
- Attitudinal
- Technological
- Policy or practice

The accessibility standards require the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers for people with disabilities in key areas of daily living on a gradual basis by 2025.

Note: Ontario's original goal was to be fully accessible by January 1, 2025. Independent reviews and public reporting indicate that this goal was not met; ongoing work continues to remove and prevent barriers across sectors.

Integrated Accessibility Standards

The Integrated Accessibility Standards (IAS) is a regulation under the AODA. The IAS sets out accessibility standards in the following areas:

- Information and Communications
- Employment
- Transportation
- Design of Public Spaces
- Customer Service

The TDSB has and continues to develop policies, procedures and practices to support accessibility for persons with disabilities in each of these areas.

Information & Communication

The TDSB:

- Provides resources or materials – including education and training documents, student records, school program information, public emergency evacuation information – in an accessible format, upon request
- Provides accessible formats and communication supports upon request in a timely manner and at no additional cost, if any, then the amount charged to others
- Consult with the person making the request to determine the format or support required
- Provides accessible or conversion-ready formats of print, digital, or multimedia resources in school libraries, upon request
- Procures accessible or conversion-ready electronic formats, where available
- Ensures all public websites and content posted on/after January 1, 2012 conform to WCAG 2.0 Level AA, except for 1.2.4 (live captions) and 1.2.5 (pre-recorded audio descriptions), as required by January 1, 2021

Employment

As required under ss. 22–32 of the IASR, the TDSB:

- Provides individualized workplace emergency response information for employees with disabilities
- Implements accessible processes for recruitment, assessment, selection, performance management, career development, and redeployment
- Provides accessible workplace information and communication supports
- Provides workplace accommodation and return-to-work processes

Transportation

As required under ss. 33–80 of the IASR, the TDSB:

- Provides integrated accessible school transportation, where possible, or alternative accessible transportation for students with disabilities
- Consults with parents/guardians to develop individualized transportation plans

Design of Public Spaces

As required under ss. 80.1–80.44 of the IASR, the TDSB incorporates accessibility features in new or redeveloped public spaces, such as:

- Outdoor play areas
- Pedestrian walkways and sidewalks
- Parking facilities

Customer Service

The TDSB is committed to providing services to students, parents/guardians, and the public that are free of barriers and biases. We will make reasonable efforts to ensure that all policies, practices and procedures are consistent with the principles of independence, dignity, integration, and equal opportunity:

- **Independence:** allowing people with disabilities to do things on their own without unnecessary help or interference from others
- **Dignity:** service is provided in a way that allows a person with a disability to maintain self-respect and the respect of others

- **Integration:** service is provided in a way that allows a person with a disability to benefit from the same services, in the same place, and in the same or similar way as other persons
- **Equal Opportunity:** people with disabilities have an opportunity equal to that given to others to access goods or services

Everyone plays a role in providing accessible customer service to our TDSB community. Here are tips on how to interact and communicate with people who have disabilities.

How to Help, Interact and Communicate with Persons with Disabilities

To assist people who are having difficulty in accessing our goods and services, a good starting point is to ask the person how you can help. Being positive, flexible and open to suggestions will help to create a positive experience. Often, good customer service for people with disabilities can be achieved through simple and effective solutions:

- Be respectful and considerate
- Be patient
- Avoid stereotypes and don't make assumptions. Some disabilities are not visible
- Ask, "May I help you?"
- Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to their support person
- Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times
- Don't touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without permission

Vision Loss

Vision loss reduces a person's ability to see clearly. Few people with vision loss are totally blind. Many have limited vision such as tunnel vision, where a person has a loss of peripheral or side vision, or a lack of central vision, which means they cannot see straight ahead. Some people can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light. Vision loss can restrict the persons' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. Some of these people may use a guide dog or white cane, but others may not. Sometimes it may be difficult to tell if a person has vision loss.

Types of assistance a person might use: Braille, large print, magnification devices, white cane, guide dog, and a support person such as a sighted guide.

Tips

- Say your name even if you know the person well as many voices sound similar
- Don't assume the individual can't see you
- Don't touch the person without asking permission
- Offer your elbow to guide the person
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment
- Don't leave the person in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair or guide them to a comfortable location
- If you need to leave the person, let them know
- Be clear and precise when giving directions
- When providing printed information, offer to read or summarize it

Deaf, Oral Deaf, Deafened or Hard of Hearing

People who have hearing loss may be deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing. People who are profoundly deaf may identify themselves as culturally deaf or oral deaf.

“*Oral deaf*” identifies people who are born deaf or became deaf before learning to speak but are taught to speak and may not typically use American Sign Language.

“*Deafened*” identifies people who experience slow or sudden loss of hearing in adulthood. They may use speech with visual cues such as captioning or computerized notetaking, speech-reading or sign language.

“*Hard of hearing*” identifies people who use their residual hearing (hearing that remains) and speech to communicate. They may supplement communication by speech-reading, hearing aids, and sign language and/or communication devices.

Types of assistance used: hearing aid, paper and pen, personal amplification device (e.g., Pocket Talker), phone amplifier, relay service, Teletypewriter (TTY), hearing ear dog, support person such as a sign language interpreter

Tips

- Attract the person's attention before speaking with a gentle touch on the shoulder or with a gentle wave of your hand
- Don't shout
- Move to a well-lit area where the person can see your face, as some people read lips

- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (i.e. a pen and paper)
- Look at, speak, and directly address the person, not the interpreter or support person
- Be clear and precise when giving directions
- Don't assume that the person knows sign language or reads lips

Deafblind

A person who is deafblind can neither see nor hear to some degree. This results in difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Many people who are deafblind will be accompanied by an intervenor, a professional who helps with communicating.

Types of assistance used: Braille, large print, print on paper (using black felt marker on non-glossy white paper or using portable white and black boards), communication boards, hearing aid with built-in FM system, magnification equipment such as monocular or magnifier, teletypewriter (TTY), white cane, service animal, support person such as intervenor.

Tips

- Don't assume. Some people who are deafblind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither
- A person who is deafblind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with them or give you an assistant card or a note explaining how to communicate
- Identify yourself to the intervenor when you approach the person who is deafblind but then speak directly to the person as you normally would
- Don't suddenly touch a person who is deafblind or touch the person without permission

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities, and not all require a wheelchair. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Types of assistance used: elevator, mobility device (e.g., wheelchair, scooter, walker, cane, crutches), and support person.

Tips

- Speak naturally and directly to the person, not to their companion or support person.
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation with someone in a wheelchair or scooter, consider sitting so that you can make eye contact.

- Ask before you help. People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things.
- Respect the person's personal space.
- Don't move items or equipment, such as canes and walkers, out of the person's reach.
- Don't touch assistive devices without permission.
- If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair, remember to: wait for and follow the person's instructions, confirm that the person is ready to move, describe what you're going to do before you do it, avoid uneven ground and objects, and not to leave the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of opening doors.
- Let the person know about accessible features in the immediate area (e.g. automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators, ramps).

Invisible (or Non-Visible) Disabilities

Invisible (or non-visible) disabilities are disabilities that are not immediately apparent. They can affect a person's cognitive processes, mental health, sensory processing, energy levels, chronic pain, or communication abilities.

Examples include learning disabilities, ADHD, autism spectrum conditions, mental health disabilities, chronic fatigue, chronic pain, epilepsy, diabetes, hearing loss, low vision, and many others. Because these disabilities are not always visible, it is important to avoid assumptions and approach each person with respect, patience, and flexibility.

Invisible disabilities can impact how a person receives, processes, or responds to information and may influence endurance, focus, memory, communication, or emotional regulation. Creating an inclusive and supportive environment begins with recognizing that you cannot always see a disability, but you can always provide supportive, barrier-free service.

Mental Health Disabilities

Mental health disabilities are not as visible as many other types of disabilities. You may not know that the person has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. Examples of mental health disabilities include schizophrenia, depression, phobias, as well as bipolar, anxiety and mood disorders.

A person with a mental health disability may have difficulty with thinking clearly, hallucinations, depression or acute mood swings, poor concentration, difficulty remembering, and apparent lack of motivation. If someone is experiencing difficulty controlling his or her symptoms, or is in a

crisis, you may want to help out. Be calm and professional and ask the person how you can best help.

Types of assistance used: service animal, support person.

Tips

- Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with the person to try to meet his or her needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask them to tell you the best way to help.

Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit the person's ability to learn, communicate, socialize and take care of their everyday needs. You may not know that someone has this type of disability unless you are told. As much as possible, treat the person with intellectual or developmental disabilities like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate that you treat them with respect.

Types of assistance used: communication board, speech generating device, service animal, support person.

Tips

- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- To confirm if the person understands what you have said, consider asking the person to repeat the message back to you in his or her own words.
- If you cannot understand what is being said, simply ask again.
- Provide one piece of information at a time.
- Be supportive and patient.
- Speak directly to the person, not to his or her companion or support person.

Learning Disabilities

The term "learning disability" describes a range of information processing disorders that can affect how a person acquires, organizes, expresses, retains, understands or uses verbal or non-verbal information.

Examples include dyslexia (problems in reading and related language-based learning); dyscalculia (problems in mathematics); and dysgraphia (problems in writing and fine motor skills).

It is important to know that having a learning disability does not mean a person is incapable of learning, but that the person learns in a different way.

Learning disabilities can result in different communication difficulties for people.

They can be subtle and can interfere with the person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not know that a person has a learning disability unless you are told.

Types of assistance used: alternative technology for writing, calculator, scanning or reading technology, and tape recorders, mini pocket recorders.

Tips

- Speak naturally, clearly and directly to the person.
- Allow extra time if necessary.
- Communicate in a way that takes into account the person's disability.
- Be patient and be willing to explain something again, if needed.

Speech or Language Impairments

Some people have problems communicating because of their disability. Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult to pronounce words or may cause slurring or stuttering. The disability may also prevent a person from expressing themselves or prevent them from understanding written or spoken language.

Types of assistance used: communication board, paper and pen, speech generating device, support person.

Tips

- Don't assume that because a person has one disability, he or she also has another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking, it doesn't mean he or she has an intellectual or developmental disability as well.
- Ask the person to repeat the information if you don't understand.
- Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" if possible.
- Try to allow enough time to communicate with the person as he or she may speak more slowly.
- Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences.

Interacting with a Person with a Service Animal

People with disabilities may use service animals on parts of our premises that are open to the public unless the animal is otherwise excluded by law from the premises.

An animal is a service animal if it is readily apparent that the animal is used by the person for reasons relating to his or her disability, or if the person has a letter from a physician or nurse verifying that the animal is required for reasons relating to his or her disability. If it is not readily apparent, staff may ask for **documentation from a regulated health professional** (e.g., physician, nurse, psychologist, occupational therapist, optometrist, audiologist, social worker, physiotherapist, psychotherapist, chiropractor) confirming the person requires the animal for disability-related reasons.

Tips

- Remember that a service animal is not a pet; it is a working animal.
- Avoid touching or addressing service animals. They are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Avoid making assumptions about the animal. Not all service animals wear special collars or harnesses.
- Remember, the person is responsible for the care and supervision of their service animal. You are not expected to provide care or food for the animal. However, you could provide water for the animal if requested.

Interacting with a Person who has a Support Person

A support person accompanies a person with a disability to provide services or assistance with communication, mobility, personal care, medical needs or access. He or she could be a paid personal support worker, volunteer, a friend or a family member. He or she does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications.

Tips

- A person with a disability might not introduce his or her support person. If you are not sure which person is the support person, take your lead from the person using or requesting your goods or services or simply ask.
- Once you have determined who the person with a disability is, speak directly to them, not to the support person.
- Be familiar with your organization's policies, practices and procedures about providing accessible customer service.

Get Training on Assistive Devices

Training is available to staff on how to use equipment or assistive devices that may be offered to persons with disabilities.

Provide Notices of Disruption in Service and Facilities

If there is a temporary, planned or unexpected disruption to facilities or services that are usually used by people with disabilities, the TDSB must notify the community of this disruption by posting a notice in an accessible format. The notice should include information about the reason for the disruption, its expected duration, and a description of alternate facilities or services, if available. This notice should be posted in a conspicuous area at or near the disrupted service/facility, and/or on our website. Sample notices of disruptions are posted on TDSBWeb.

Resources

- The [Toronto District School Board](#)
- [TDSB policies and procedures](#) related to accessibility.
- [How to Make Websites Accessible](#)
- The [Teachable Project](#) - Training for Classroom Staff
- [Access Forward](#)
- The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) - www.ohrc.on.ca/en

Contact Us

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