



Halton District School Board

# Annual Accessibility Plan 2011 - 2012



Prepared by:  
Halton District School Board  
Accessibility Working Group

This publication is available on the Halton District School Board website  
[www.hdsb.ca](http://www.hdsb.ca) and in alternate formats.

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

	<b>Page</b>
Halton District School Board: Mission, Vision and Values	3
Background: AODA, 2005	4
1. Aim	5
2. Objectives	5
3. Commitment to accessibility planning	5
4. Description of the Halton District School Board	6
5. The Accessibility Working Group Members	7
6. Barrier-removal initiatives during 2010-2011	8
7. Measures in Place: Preventing new barriers	10
8. Barrier-identification methodologies	10
9. Barriers that will be addressed 2011-2012	10
10. Review and monitoring process	11
11. Communication of the plan	11
12. Definitions: Disability, Barriers – Description of Barriers	12
Appendix A: Suggested Reference/Resource Materials	15
Appendix B: About Disability – the disability continuum	17
Appendix C: Where to Look for Barriers	23

Halton District School Board Mission and Values: 2011 to 2015 (DRAFT as of Sept. 21/11)

*The Halton District School Board is committed to every student. We will...*

- *Inspire and support learning;*
- *Create safe, healthy, inclusive and engaging environments; and*
- *Provide opportunities for challenge and choice*
- *Prepare students for success*

*The Halton District School Board values and respects:*

*Relationships                      Responsibility                      Ingenuity*

The operational plan, approved by the Board of Trustees in May 2011, includes nine specific goals which address **students**, **staff** and **system**:

- *Literacy and numeracy achievement*
- *Student success for all students*
- *Safety and well-being*
- *Staff development*
- *Staff wellness*
- *Leadership development*
- *Program accommodation*
- *Communication*
- *Technology*

Of particular note in relation to accessibility is the Safety and Well-being goal. One of the specific targets of this goal is:

- *all students will indicate a positive response on the “belonging” and “communication and community” domains of the annual Tell Them From Me survey.*

The following are some of the strategies to be implemented to accomplish these goals:

- Equity and Inclusive Education policy and guidelines
- Progressive Discipline and School Safety, Education Act (amended)
- Bullying Prevention and Intervention
- Threat Assessment
- Restorative Justice practices
- Collaborative Problem Solving
- Cultural proficiency development
- Social skills development (ex Tribes, LINK-Crew, etc.)
- Caring and Safe Schools in Ontario: Supporting Students with Special Education

## Needs Through Progressive Discipline, Kindergarten to Grade 12

The mission, values and goals of the Halton District School Board are reflected in the Annual Accessibility Plan for the 2011-2012 school year. The Halton District School Board is committed to the continual improvement of access to school board facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community with disabilities. It is our intent to expand our focus by including more avenues for collaboration with people with disabilities in the review of our annual plan.

### **Background: The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005**

The intent of the ***Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*** is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities, and to provide for their involvement in the identification, removal and prevention of barriers to their full participation in the life of the province. The goal is for Ontario to be barrier-free, accessible, by 2025. The Act requires that school boards:

- prepare an annual accessibility plan,
- consult with people with disabilities in the preparation of the plan,
- make the plan public.

The Act allows organizations to determine their own priorities and implement them within existing planning processes and using existing resources. Once the Provincial Education Standards working group sets out the series of five-year plans, our plan will be adjusted to reflect any changes in priorities.

The Accessibility Plan 2011 - 2012 has been prepared by the Accessibility Working Group of the Halton District School Board. The plan describes:

- measures that the Halton District School Board has taken in the past,
- measures that the Halton District School Board will take during 2011 - 2012 to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

The Accessibility Working Group identified a number of barriers for people with disabilities, and recommends continued focus on identifying, removing and preventing barriers in the areas of attitudinal, policy/practice, physical, architectural, information and communication for the 2011-2012 school year.

The Accessibility Working Group is currently exploring strategies to put in place for the following areas covered by *O. Regulation 191/11 Integrated Accessibility Regulation (IAR)* addressing Information and Communication, Transportation, and Employment. This Regulation came into effect June 3, 2011. The *Built Environment* Standard is still in discussion.

## 1. Aim

This plan describes the measures that the Halton District School Board has taken in the past and measures that will be taken during the next year (2011 - 2012) to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities who work in, use or access school board facilities and services.

## 2. Objectives

This plan:

1. Describes the *process* by which the Halton District School Board will identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities
2. Reviews efforts at the Halton District School Board to remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities during the *past year(s)*
3. Lists the policies, procedures, programs, practices and services that the Halton District School Board will review in the *coming year* to identify barriers for people with disabilities
4. Describes the *measures* the Halton District School Board will take in the coming year to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities
5. Describes how the Halton District School Board will make this accessibility plan *available to the public*

## 3. Commitment to Accessibility Planning

The Annual Accessibility Plan of the Halton District School Board will be approved by Administrative Council and shared with Trustees and the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) for information in line with the Halton District School Board's governance policy prior to being posted on the Board website.

The Halton District School Board is committed to:

- Establishing an Accessibility Working Group
- Consulting with board employee groups and people with disabilities in the development and review of its annual accessibility plans
- Ensuring school board policies and procedures are consistent with the principles of accessibility
- Improving access to facilities, policies, programs, practices and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and members of the community

The Director of Education has authorized the Accessibility Working Group to prepare an accessibility plan that will enable the Halton District School Board to meet these commitments.

#### **4. Description of the Halton District School Board**

The Halton District School Board is a regional school board serving approximately 57,000 public school students in the municipalities of Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton and Oakville in southern Ontario. All four municipalities form the Regional Municipality of Halton. The Region of Halton and the Halton District School Board share the same boundaries encompassing 232,000 acres of land, 25 kilometres of which are along the shore of Lake Ontario.

Regular curriculum includes a wide range of topics including – but not limited to – core French, technology, vocational, music and arts programs. Other programs offered within the Halton District School Board include French Immersion, English-as-a-Second-Language, adult and continuing education programs. Special education programs are also provided by the Halton District School Board for students with special education needs.

With total budget revenues of approximately \$560 million the Halton District School Board operates 81 elementary schools and 17 secondary schools. This represents a \$32m increase and enrolment growth of 2.8% over last year. A team of 192 principals and vice-principals, 14 senior staff as well as more than 3,367 teaching staff, and 1,309 support/non-teaching staff make the Halton District School Board one of the region's largest employers.

Public school supporters in the Region of Halton elect a board of 11 trustees, who establish policies and direction of the Halton District School Board. Two student trustees have been appointed for 2011-2012. Board meetings occur on the first and third Wednesday of each month. Public session for all meetings begins at 7 pm. All meetings take place in the boardroom of the J.W. Singleton Education Centre, 2050 Guelph Line, Burlington, L7R 3Z2.

The Halton District School Board believes that public education is one of the major cornerstones of a prosperous and democratic Canada. Its essential and critical role must continue through commitment to our mission and guiding principles.

## 5. The Accessibility Working Group Members

The accessibility working group was formally constituted in May 2003 and currently consists of the following members:

<b><i>Member</i></b>	<b><i>Department</i></b>	<b><i>Contact Information</i></b>
Chair: Jacki Oxley	System Administrator, Community Engagement	<a href="mailto:oxleyj@hdsb.ca">oxleyj@hdsb.ca</a>  (905) 335-3663 x3208
Cathy Thier	Manager, Systems Development  Information Technology	<a href="mailto:thierc@hdsb.ca">thierc@hdsb.ca</a>  905-335-3663 x 3338
Nick Maandag	Regional Supervisor, Plant Operations  Facility Services	<a href="mailto:maandagn@hdsb.ca">maandagn@hdsb.ca</a>  (905) 335-3663 x 3333
John McEgan	Assistant Manager, Plant Operations  Facility Services	<a href="mailto:mceganj@hdsb.ca">mceganj@hdsb.ca</a>  905-335-3663 x 3227
Mike Wildfong	Project Coordinator,  Facility Services	<a href="mailto:wildfongm@hdsb.ca">wildfongm@hdsb.ca</a>  905-335-3663 x 3236
Dianna Bower	Trustee	<a href="mailto:bowerd@hdsb.ca">bowerd@hdsb.ca</a>
Sue Roszell	System Principal, Student Services	<a href="mailto:roszells@hdsb.ca">roszells@hdsb.ca</a>  905-631-6120 x 336
Veerle Ryckewaert	Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC); Autism Ontario – Halton Chapter	<a href="mailto:vryckewaert@cogeco.ca">vryckewaert@cogeco.ca</a>
Marian Thorpe	Coordinator, Special Education  Student Services	<a href="mailto:thorpem@hdsb.ca">thorpem@hdsb.ca</a>  (905) 631-6120 ext 331
Judi Goldsworthy	Manager, Employee Health Services  Human Resources	<a href="mailto:goldsworthyj@hdsb.ca">goldsworthyj@hdsb.ca</a>  905-335-3663 x 3221
HEPA representative	Tony Dileo, Vice Principal  Brookville Public School	<a href="mailto:dileot@hdsb.ca">dileot@hdsb.ca</a>  905-854-2424

HSPA representative	Claire Ailey, Vice Principal	<a href="mailto:aileyc@hdsb.ca">aileyc@hdsb.ca</a>
	Burlington Central School	905-634-7768

## 6. Barrier-removal Initiatives during 2011-2012

During the last several years, there have been a number of initiatives in the Halton District School Board to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities.

The Halton District School Board, through its Special Education Plan addresses access for students with disabilities through modifications and accommodations of programs and services. The Special Education Plan is available on the board website at [www.hdsb.ca](http://www.hdsb.ca).

Since 1998, the Halton District School Board has run an integrated Track and Field Meet where elementary students with physical and/or intellectual disabilities participate alongside their peers. Each year over 100 students with disabilities participate in the event.

We partnered with Community Living Oakville, Erinoak, other community service providers and the Halton Catholic District School Board to design the 5<sup>th</sup> *Annual Halton Accessibility Showcase* for agencies and service providers in Halton Region. The Showcase, held on April 28, 2011 at the Halton Regional auditorium, featured displays by more than 60 community groups addressing accessibility services and support programs for people with disabilities of all ages. With more than 250 members of the public attending the 2011 Showcase, this event will be held again in the Spring of 2012 with more vendors to address the service/programs gaps identified by the Showcase participants.

During the Spring 2009 through to Fall 2009, Harrison Consulting was hired to perform an accessibility audit on all our schools, J. W. Singleton Education Centre and New Street Education Centre. The extensive report is posted on the board website. It is this report that guides our facility renovations to accommodate the needs of our students and staff with disabilities.

[http://www.hdsb.ca/AboutUs/FacilityServices/Operations%20Docs/HALTON\\_DSB\\_NOV\\_27-09%20FINAL%20AUDIT%20REPORT.pdf](http://www.hdsb.ca/AboutUs/FacilityServices/Operations%20Docs/HALTON_DSB_NOV_27-09%20FINAL%20AUDIT%20REPORT.pdf)

To further awareness of supporting members of the general public, including our parents with disabilities, the AODA Customer Service regulation focusing on inclusive, respectful language and ways of interacting with people with disabilities is addressed in the *Creating a Culture of Accessibility, 2010* booklet. The booklet was vetted by a variety of persons and groups in Halton. The booklet is available at all HDSB venues and on the website at [www.hdsb.ca](http://www.hdsb.ca).

Many of our schools have been renovated to improve accessibility with the inclusion of automatic door openers on school interior and exterior doorways, elevators in most schools with multiple stories, ramps for school front and rear access points, accessible washrooms, parking spaces designated for people with disabilities and renovations to

some schools to accommodate track lifting for students with physical disabilities, to name a few.

Since 1991, the design of new schools includes architectural features that incorporate the principles of universal design meeting government accessibility requirements. Renovations to existing buildings have accessibility for people with disabilities addressed in the plans, as resources permit.

The Board Room at J. W. Singleton Education Centre has a Hearing Assist system in place for people who are deaf or hard of hearing to facilitate their participation when attending Board Meetings.

The following chart is a synopsis of some of the major accomplishments during the 2010-2011.

<b>Type of Barrier</b>	<b>Strategy for Barrier Removal</b>	<b>Action Taken 2010-2011</b>
Policy/Practice	Address equity and inclusion in our schools and workplaces	<p><i>Equity and Inclusive Education</i> policy approved by Trustees September 2010</p> <p>Established the Equity and Inclusive Education Steering Advisory Committee – meets 5x/yr</p> <p><i>Faith Accommodation Guidelines</i> completed</p> <p>Explored the Employment Standards Regulation clauses in O.Reg. 191/11</p> <p>Reviewed the timelines for the <i>Integrated Accessibility Regulation</i></p>
Communication and Information	<p>Halton Accessibility Showcase featuring services and programs for people with disabilities.</p> <p>Employee awareness of mental health disabilities and barriers to participation</p>	<p>Held April 28, 2011 – 250 attendees and 60+ vendor product and services displays</p> <p>Student Services Support staff published a brochure for schools <i>Intervention Plan for a Potentially Suicidal Student</i></p> <p>Student Support Leadership Initiative (SSLI) sponsored the following events:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mar. 2/11: LINK – showcase of community services for professionals working with students and families</li> <li>• Apr. 7/11: <i>How to Talk to Your</i></li> </ul>

	Review the Integrated Accessibility and Built Environment draft Regulations	<p><i>Child About Anxiety</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 2/11: <i>Youth Mental Health, It's Everybody's Business</i></li> </ul> <p>Both Standards reviewed and provided input to OESC re Integrated Accessibility Regulation. The Transportation Standard for integrated transportation has been met and is in compliance with the Standard (s.75 (2a,b)).</p>
Physical	Continuously upgrading of facilities to accommodate students and staff with accessibility needs	Facility Services - ongoing
Attitudinal	New employees participate in the Customer Service training	ongoing
Architectural	HDSB building Manual is continuously updated to reflect accessible design	ongoing

## 7. Measures in Place: Preventing new barriers

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform school board programs, policies, practices and services to reduce and minimize barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. We strive to create an environment that is accessible through the annual accessibility planning process to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

## 8. Barrier-identification Methodologies

The Accessibility Working Group is using the following barrier-identification methods:

<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Status</b>
Presentation to Senior Administration	Opportunity for input and feedback	September, 2011
Presentation to Trustees	For information	September 21, 2011
Presentation to SEAC	Opportunity for input and feedback	Sept. 13, 2011
Presentations to Employee Groups (HUC)	For information	October 2011
Communication with Public	Plan posted on board website	October 2011
Accessibility Working Group	Review, plan, and make recommendations for year 8 plan; report progress about Year 7 plan	ongoing meetings

## 9. Barriers to be addressed in 2011 - 2012

The Accessibility Working Group will address six barrier groupings during the coming year. Our focus this year is to continue to raise awareness about the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the Board Accessibility Plan.

It is our intent to expand our focus by including more avenues to collaborate with people with disabilities in the review of our annual accessibility plan.

This plan will address at least one area in each of communication, information, attitude, physical, policy/practice and architecture.

In addition, the Accessibility Working Group will review and begin planning for 2 new Regulations addressing the Built Environment and the Integrated Accessibility Standard (Information and Communication, Transportation, Employment). These Regulations, made under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, establish accessibility standards and apply to every designated public sector organization and to every other person or organization that provides goods or services to members of the public or other third parties that has at least one employee in Ontario.

## 10. Review and monitoring process

The Accessibility Working Group meets regularly during the planning year to review progress. Throughout the year, the effectiveness of implementing the barrier-removal and prevention strategies will be discussed in preparation for appropriate revisions for the eighth year of accessibility planning.

## 11. Communication of the plan

The Halton District School Board's accessibility plan is posted on the board website at [www.hdsb.ca](http://www.hdsb.ca) and hard copies are available. The plan can be made available in accessible formats.

12. **Definition of Disability:** The AODA adopts the broad definition for disability that is set out in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*. "Disability" is:

- (a) any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device.
- (b) a condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability;
- (c) a learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language;

- (d) a mental disorder, or
- (e) an injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the *Workplace Safety and Insurance Act*, 1997.

### **What is a barrier?**

A “barrier” is anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of his or her disability, including a physical barrier, an architectural barrier, an informational or communications barrier, an attitudinal barrier, a technological barrier, a policy or a practice.

**Physical Barrier:** objects added to the environment – doors, windows, elevators, furniture, etc.

**Architectural Barrier:** building design, area adjacent to the building, shape of room, size of doorways, etc.

**Information Barrier:** inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, etc.

**Communication Barrier:** difficulties receiving information in person or by telephone, difficulties interacting with receptionists or other staff, difficulties receiving training

**Attitudinal Barrier:** staff who do not know how to communicate with people with disabilities, discriminatory behaviours

**Technological Barrier:** computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones and switches, assistive technologies

**Policy or Practice Barrier:** rules, regulations and protocols that prevent one performing their job satisfactorily, or from serving the public, or that restrict participation.

## Accessibility Action Plans for 2011-2012

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Means to remove or prevent barriers</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
<b>Policy and Procedures</b>	Engage in long-range accessibility planning as required by the Integrated Accessibility Standard (O. Reg. 191/11)	Prepare 5 year plans as part of the Annual Accessibility Plan	Jan. 1, 2012	Accessibility Working Group
	Training to Educators: provide all employees who are involved in program or course design, delivery and instruction – must provide all educators with accessibility awareness training related to accessible program, course delivery of instruction.	Student Services and Program Services to explore what exists and what needs to be developed	Jan. 1, 2013	School Program Services, Student Services, Accessibility Working Group (OESC is preparing these materials for all boards and will be available Sept. 2012)
	Workplace Emergency Response Information made clear to all employees	Individualized workplace emergency response information to employees who have a disability if the disability requires this and the employer is aware of the need. Supported through the Attendance Services tracking program	Jan. 1, 2012	Human Resources
<b>Communication and Information</b>  Strategy to keep members of the community updated with regard to programs and services for people with disabilities in Halton	Community groups, staff and agencies have the opportunity to showcase programs and services for people with disabilities in Halton	Organize and implement the Annual Halton Accessibility Showcase featuring displays by community groups addressing accessibility services and support programs	Spring 2012	Accessibility Working Group to organize with HDSB Student Services and HCDSB Special Education Services with support from community agencies providing programs and services for people with disabilities.
<b>Physical</b> Long range planning	Continued upgrading of facilities to accommodate	Facilities Checklist database updated as physical plant	May 2012	Student Services

<b>Barrier</b>	<b>Objective</b>	<b>Means to remove or prevent barriers</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
required to bring all HDSB facilities up to accessible standards	students and staff with accessibility needs	accommodations made  Develop an <i>Accessibility Planning Guide for Schools</i> to consult when requesting facility renovations to accommodate the accessibility needs of students, staff, volunteers, etc.	Spring 2012	Facility Services  Accessibility Working Group
<b>Attitude</b>  Importance of continually educating our employees about people with disabilities and inclusive practices that remove barriers	All new board employees must be in-serviced about accessibility topics to increase awareness and sensitivity towards people with disabilities  Accessibility Standards for Customer Service (Reg. 429/07 training online)	All new employees to receive Customer Service Training as a condition of employment	Ongoing  ongoing	Every employee group  supervisors
<b>Architectural</b>	Continue to update Halton DSB Building Manual to reflect best practice in accessible building design	Halton DSB Building manual is continuously updated with input from SEAC.	ongoing	Facility Services

## Suggested Reference Material/Resources

**Note:**

In addition to the following resources, school boards are encouraged to consult the links provided on the Ministry of Citizenship's website (<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/index.html>) and on the Paths to Equal Opportunity website ([www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng\\_g/links](http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_g/links))

**Accessibility Planning Resources for School Boards:**

Accessibility Ontario – Guide to Annual Accessibility Planning  
<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/accessibleplanningguide.htm>

The *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2001*  
<http://www.gov.on.ca/citizenship/accessibility/english/act2001.htm>

Human Resources Development Canada, *A Way With Words*  
[http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/hrib/sdd-dds/odi/documents/waywithwords\\_tmp/purpose.shtml](http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/hrib/sdd-dds/odi/documents/waywithwords_tmp/purpose.shtml)

Community Resources for Independence, *Using Words With Dignity*  
<http://www.crinet.org/dignity.php>

Government of Ontario – Paths to Equal Opportunity  
 A-Z index – Accessibility in Educational environments  
[http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng\\_g/subject/index.asp?action=search\\_4&dir\\_id=1071](http://www.equalopportunity.on.ca/eng_g/subject/index.asp?action=search_4&dir_id=1071)

Ontario Human Rights Commission - *Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate* <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/english/publications/disability-policy.shtml>

Enablelink (Canadian Abilities Foundation) Directory of Canadian Disability Links  
[http://www.enablelink.org/resources/links\\_to.html](http://www.enablelink.org/resources/links_to.html)

Directory for Accessibility <http://www.accessibilitydirectory.ca>

Adaptive Technology Resource Centre <http://www.utoronto.ca/atrc>

Ontario Interpreter Services (OIS) <http://www.chs.ca/services/ois.html>

Canadian Standards Association: <http://www.csa.ca>  
 B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design  
 B480-02 – Customer Service Standard for People with Disabilities

Playability Tool Kit: Building Accessible Playspaces  
<http://www.opassoc.on.ca/toolkit.asp>

## **A Few Key Ontario Organizations:**

- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) <http://www.cnib.ca>
- Canadian Hearing Society <http://www.chs.ca>
- Canadian Mental Health Association – Ontario <http://www.ontario.cmha.ca>
- Community Living Ontario <http://www.oacl.on.ca>
- Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada – Ontario Division <http://www.mssociety.ca/ontario>
- Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario <http://www.ldao.on.ca>
- Little People of Ontario <http://www.lpo.on.ca>
- Ontario Brain Injury Association <http://www.obia.on.ca>
- Canadian Paraplegic Association – Ontario <http://www.canparaplegic.org/on>
- Le Phénix <http://www.lephenix.on.ca>
- Ontario March of Dimes <http://www.dimes.on.ca>
- The Easter Seal Society – Ontario <http://www.easterseals.org>
- AboutFace International <http://www.aboutfaceinternational.org>
- Tourette Syndrome Association of Ontario <http://www.tourettesyndromeontario.ca>
- Association for Bright Children <http://www.abcontario.ca>
- Halton Down Syndrome Association <http://www.dsao.ca/>
- IEWS: Support for the Families of Blind and Visually Impaired Children <http://viewson.ca>
- Autism Ontario – Halton Chapter <http://www.autismhalton.com/>

## ABOUT DISABILITY

### The Disability Continuum

There is no universally accepted meaning for the word "disability". However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles.

Most definitions, however, can be placed on a continuum. At one end of the spectrum, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model). At the opposite end, disability is explained in terms of the social and physical contexts in which it occurs (environmental model).

The medical model focuses on deficiencies, symptoms and treatments. The World Health Organization's (WHO) 1976 definition for disability, for example, is "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." Medical model definitions promote the idea that disability is a deviation from the norm.

Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength and mental powers. Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80. Beyond middle age, disability is the norm.

The environmental model explains disability in relation to social and physical contexts. In this view, the environment, not an individual's medical condition, causes disability. For example, during an electrical blackout, a person who is completely blind can effortlessly navigate around the home, hammer nails, and, if a Braille user, read a novel.

A sighted person would be unable to perform these tasks easily, if at all. In this example, the environment disables the sighted person.

The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable human beings, and that it is barriers, not medical conditions, that are disabling. Disability results when people design a world for their way of living only, without taking into account the natural - and foreseeable - variability among human beings. In other words, disability is a consequence of design flaws in the built and human environments.

All barriers are human-made. If design problems cause barriers, then disabilities can be eliminated -- or minimized -- by modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our intuitions about the proper way to do things. If systemic barriers cause disabilities, the disabilities can be eliminated by modifications to policies, plans and processes. If attitudes cause barriers, then disability awareness, respect and an understanding of positive interaction with people with disabilities will remove barriers.<sup>1</sup>

### Types of Disability and Functional Limitations

A person's disability may make it physically or cognitively challenging to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, differentiating colours, distinguishing sounds, climbing stairs, grasping small items, remembering words, or doing arithmetic.

## **Disability and the Ontario Human Rights Code**

Persons with disabilities may face challenges because of the physical or mental limitations. But the attitudes of other people may also create barriers. Understanding this social aspect of disability is essential.

The Ontario Human Rights Code protects the rights of persons with disabilities to equal treatment in employment, housing, goods, services, facilities, contracts and membership in trades or vocational associations. The Code provides a basic definition of “handicap” to include conditions that have developed over time, those that result from an accident, or have been present from birth. It includes physical, mental, and learning disabilities and it does not matter whether the condition is visible. For example, persons with mental disorders, sensory disabilities (such as hearing or vision limitations) and epilepsy are all protected under the Code.

Protection for persons with mental disabilities deserves special attention. These persons have the same rights as persons with any other kind of disability. They may, however, have trouble expressing themselves or even identifying that they have a disability.

The Code protects people from the unequal effects of discrimination. For example, a person may not actually have a disability, but may be perceived to have one. The Code will protect a person who is the victim of discrimination because another thinks that the person has a disability.

*(This information is provided as a public service by the Ontario Human Rights Commission.)*

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There are many kinds of disabilities, including physical, sensory, hearing, mental health, developmental and learning. Disabilities can be visible or non-visible.

### **Visual disabilities**

Visual disabilities reduce one’s ability to see clearly. Very few people are totally blind. Some 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 can see the outline of objects while others can see the direction of light.

Impaired vision can restrict a person’s ability to read signs, locate landmarks or see hazards. In some cases, it may be difficult to tell if a person has a visual disability. Others may use a guide dog or white cane.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with visual disabilities.

- Identify yourself when you approach the person and speak directly to them.
- Speak normally and clearly.
- Don’t refer to the disability, and never use phrases like “handicapped”.
- Never touch the person without asking permission, unless it’s an emergency.
- If you offer assistance, wait until you receive permission.
- Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Don’t touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- If you’re giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you’re approaching a door or an obstacle, say so.
- Don’t just assume the individual can’t see you.

- Don't leave the person in the middle of a room. Show them to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Don't walk away without saying good-bye.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

### **Hearing impairments**

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hearing impaired may require assistive devices when communicating. While some people may use sign language, notes or hearing aids when communicating, others may also use e-mail, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who have hearing impairments.

- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- Attract the person'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 the person can see your face.
- Look at and speak directly to the person. Address the person, 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.
- 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).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

### **Physical disabilities**

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. For example, people who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with physical disabilities.

- Speak normally and directly to the person. Don't speak to someone who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.
- Don't touch any assistive devices, including wheelchairs, unnecessarily unless it's an emergency.
- Provide the person with information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

### **Intellectual 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 one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with intellectual disabilities.

As much as possible, treat the person with an intellectual disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure the person understands what you've said.
- If you can't understand what's being said, don't pretend. Just ask again.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Be polite and patient.
- Speak directly to the person, not to someone who's with him or her.

### **Learning or cognitive disabilities**

Learning or cognitive disabilities can result in a host of different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with the person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with learning or cognitive disabilities.

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person
- Take some time — people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you're dealing with a child, be patient, encouraging and supportive.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- Be courteous and patient and the person will let you know how to best provide service in a way that works for them.

### **Mental health disabilities**

People with mental health disabilities look like anyone else. You won't know that the person has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. Be calm and professional and let the person tell you how you can best help.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with mental health disabilities.

- Treat people with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be confident and reassuring, and listen to persons with a mental health disability and their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help.
- Take the person with a mental health disability seriously, and work with them to meet their needs.

### **Speech and language disabilities**

Some people have problems communicating. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with speech and language disabilities.

- Just because a person has one disability doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; don't assume they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- Don't refer to the disability, and never use phrases like "handicapped".
- If you are able, ask questions that can be answered 'yes' or 'no'.

- Take some time. Be patient and polite, and give the person whatever time he/she needs to get his/her point across.
- Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences. Wait for them to finish.

Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

### **Deaf-blind disabilities**

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 intervener, a professional who helps with communicating. Interveners 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 suggestions to help you interact with people 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 person 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 the person, as you normally would, not to the intervener.
- Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach the person 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.<sup>2</sup>

### **Other**

Disabilities result from other conditions, accidents, illnesses, and diseases, including ALS (Lou Gehrig disease), M.S. (Multiple Sclerosis), allergies, anaphylaxis, asthma, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, environmental sensitivities, seizure disorders, heart disease, stroke and joint replacement to name a few.

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved August 2006 from [http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/mcass/english/topics/pop\\_ado\\_needs.htm](http://www.mcass.gov.on.ca/mcass/english/topics/pop_ado_needs.htm)

**Where to Look for Barriers**

**1. Physical Barriers:**

- Furniture
- Chairs
- Door knobs
- Classroom design
- Planters
- Locks
- Drinking fountains
- Telephones
- Work stations
- Doors
- Handrails
- Windows
- Bathroom hardware
- Security systems
- Seats, tables, counters

**2. Architectural Barriers:**

- Exterior to a building
- Parking areas
- Hallways
- Carpets
- Reception areas
- Classrooms
- Cubicles
- Cafeterias
- Escalators
- Stairwells
- Storage areas
- Entrances
- Interior of a building
- Drop-off zones
- Floors
- Lobbies
- Offices
- Athletic facilities
- Washrooms
- Elevators
- Stairs
- Closets
- Lighting
- Assembly halls

**3. Information/Communication Barriers:**

- Books
- Web-based resources
- Bulletin boards
- Training
- Forms
- Fax transmissions
- Computer screens
- Printed information
- Signage
- Brochures
- Receptionists
- Manuals
- Equipment labels
- Public announcements

**4. Attitudinal Barriers:**

- Biases and beliefs
- Lack of understanding
- Stigmatization - \*See also "Policy/practice" below
- Lack of information/knowledge
- Lack of sensitivity/intolerance

**5. Technological Barriers:**

- Computers
- Standard software
- Websites
- Mice
- Fax machines
- TTYs
- Appliances
- Switches
- Operating systems
- Proprietary software
- Keyboards
- Printers
- Telephones
- Photocopiers
- Control panels

**6. Policy/Practice Barriers:**

- Procurement and purchasing
- Hiring
- Testing
- Promotion
- Regulations
- Protocols
- Community use of facilities

- Job postings
- Interviewing
- Meetings
- By-laws
- Rules
- Safety and evacuation