AUGUST 2026

Nanaimo Ladysmith
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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NANAIMO LADYSMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

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NANAIMO LADYSMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS
ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools acknowledges that
our district is located within the traditional territories of the Snuneymuxw, Snaw-Naw-As, and Stz'uminus First Nations. We are also grateful for our partnerships with the Tillicum Lelum Aboriginal Friendship Centre and the Mid Island Métis Nation and remain committed to advancing equity, accessibility, and belonging for all. We recognize the importance of relationships, inclusion, and shared responsibility in creating welcoming and accessible communities.

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT NANAIMO-LADYSMITH PUBLIC SCHOOLS (NLPS)

NLPS enrolls approximately 17, 750 students, including approximately 2, 565 Indigenous students, and 1,896 students with disabilities and diverse abilities who are supported through Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The District offers a full range of programs from kindergarten to grade 12 with additional programs for pre-school and adult learners. There are: 29 elementary schools, one of which is located on reserve and is co-governed with Snuneymuxw First Nation; eight secondary schools (including Learning Alternatives and Career Technical Centre); one distributed learning school – Island ConnectED (K12); an International Student Education program; and approximately 2200 employees.

NLPS values strong partnerships that help support the well-being and success of students and families. Through our collaboration with the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Schools Foundation, students and families have access to food programs and other essential community supports. Early learning opportunities are available through StrongStart programs, and the district continues to expand access to onsite childcare across our schools. For secondary students, a wide range of learning opportunities is offered, including fine arts and sports academies, outdoor learning experiences, and work experience placements. At both the elementary and secondary levels, outreach services provide additional support for students who may experience barriers to regular school attendance, helping them remain connected to learning and their school community.

OUR ACCESSIBILITY STORY

Accessibility is about creating learning and working environments where everyone can participate, contribute, and experience a genuine sense of belonging. NLPS recognizes that accessibility benefits all members of our community by reducing barriers and increasing opportunities for meaningful participation. Accessibility is not only about physical spaces; it also includes how people access information, communicate, engage in learning and work, and participate in school and community life.

Our accessibility journey builds on the strengths of our schools, the voices and experiences of our students, staff, families, Indigenous rights holders, and community partners, and our shared commitment to equity and inclusion. We recognize that barriers can be physical, attitudinal, systemic, technological, or related to communication, and that identifying and addressing these barriers is an ongoing responsibility.

This work supports the district's commitment to student success, staff and student wellness, inclusive learning environments, and strong relationships with the communities we serve.

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools is committed to creating learning and working environments where everyone feels safe, welcome, and included. An important part of that commitment is ensuring our schools, workplaces, programs, services, and communications are accessible to all members of our learning community.

Our 2026-2029 Accessibility Plan presents a roadmap for this work. It identifies priorities and actions to help us recognize, remove and identify barriers that could limit the participation of students, staff, families and community members. Meaningful progress requires us to listen to those who experience barriers firsthand. The voices and lived experiences of people with disabilities, along with the work of our Accessibility Advisory Committee and feedback from our wider school community, are essential in helping us understand where barriers exist and how we may address them.

We also recognize that accessibility is an ongoing process. As our schools and communities continue to grow and change, we will continue to learn, adapt and improve.

Through this plan, Nanaimo Laydmisth Public Schools will continue to work to build an accessible and equitable school district where everyone has the opportunity to learn, work, participate, and belong.

Sincerely,



Robyn Gray
Superintendent and CEO

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

As a Board of Education, accessibility is fundamental to our vision that every learner can belong, grow, and thrive in our school district.
This is reflected in our 2024-2028 Strategic Plan, which recognizes the need to address barriers across the district and ensure students, staff and families feel welcomed, valued and supported.

Our Accessibility Plan builds on these priorities and puts them into action. Removing barriers can make a real difference in how students experience their learning, how supported employees feel in their work, and how families and community members connect with our school district.

It also supports our broader goals around student and employee wellness, strengthens a sense of inclusion, and improves outcomes for students with diverse abilities.

As a Board, we recognize that accessibility requires ongoing listening, reflection, and action. We are committed to supporting this work and to learning from the experiences of those in our community.

Sincerely,



Leanne Lee

MESSAGE FROM OUR ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

The development of this Three-Year Accessibility Plan is an important step in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to participation. Informed by feedback from students, staff, families, rights holders, and community partners, as well as the work of the Accessibility Committee, the plan outlines priorities and actions that will strengthen accessibility, inclusion, and equitable access across the district.

We recognize that accessibility benefits everyone. By improving access to learning environments, services, information, and facilities, we create more welcoming and inclusive spaces for all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF KEY CONTRIBUTORS

The committee met four times between September and April, and consists of: rights holders (a member of Snuneymuxw First Nation, a representative from Tillicum Lelum); the parent of a student with a disability, staff from a number of departments (Human Resources, Learning Services, Facilities and Communications); a Principal, and representatives from both CUPE and the NDTA.

DEFINITIONS

ABLEISM: The discrimination, prejudice, or barriers that disadvantage people with disabilities by valuing certain abilities as more important or normal than others.

ACCESSIBILITY: The state of having programs, services and environments that allow all individuals to participate fully in society without encountering barriers.

ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE: An official group formed by one or more organizations in collaboration with people with disabilities, to create an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.

ACCESSIBILITY PLAN: A plan developed by an Accessibility Committee that identifies challenges and solutions for addressing accessibility barriers.

BARRIER: Anything that prevents a person with a disability from fully participating in all aspects of society because of their disability. This includes physical/environmental, attitudinal, information, communications, policy or practice, and technological barriers.



DISABILITY: The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier. (For more information about disability and types of disability and support, refer to Appendix A: Disabilities.)

IMPAIRMENT: A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual, cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary or episodic.

Types of barriers:

a. **Physical/Environmental Barrier:** A barrier resulting from building design, smells/sounds, lighting, the area adjacent to the building, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, and so on.

b. **Attitudinal Barrier:** A barrier that arises from the attitudes discriminatory behaviours and a lack of disability awareness.

c. **Communication Barrier:** A barrier that arises from

difficulties receiving information in person, by telephone or online, interacting with teachers, peers, receptionists or other staff, and receiving training.

d. **Information Barrier:** A barrier that arises from inadequate or incomprehensible signage, difficulties reading brochures, forms, manuals, websites, fax transmissions, equipment labels, computer screens, and so on.

e. **Policy or Practice Barrier:** Rules, regulations and protocols that prevent a person from performing their job satisfactorily or participating in society. Policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.

f. **Technological Barrier:** Barriers resulting from computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones and switches, including the lack of assistive technologies.

SECTION 2 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NLPS Accessibility Plan 2026–2029 outlines the district's commitment to identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to participation for students, staff, families, and community members. Guided by the Accessible British Columbia Act and informed by consultation with stakeholders and rights holders, the plan reflects both the progress made through the inaugural 2023–2026 Accessibility Plan and the opportunities that remain.

Over the past three years, the district has advanced accessibility through improvements to facilities, communications, learning environments, professional learning, and community engagement. Feedback gathered through consultation, committee discussions, and the district's accessibility reporting process helped identify priorities for continued action.

The 2026–2029 plan focuses on three key areas: Inclusive Practice and Workforce Capacity, Accessible Learning and Physical Spaces, and Transparent Communication and Shared Accountability. Through annual monitoring, evaluation, and community engagement, NLPS will continue to strengthen accessibility, support equitable participation, and create learning and working environments where everyone can belong, grow, and thrive.

SECTION 3 - FRAMEWORK GUIDING OUR WORK

CONTEXT & LEGISLATION

The NLPS Accessibility Plan aligns with international, national, and provincial efforts to create inclusive, barrier-free environments where all people can participate fully and equitably. It is guided by human rights legislation and informed by the experiences of people with disabilities.

GLOBAL CONTEXT

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)** was adopted in 2006 and ratified by Canada in 2010. The Convention promotes the rights, dignity, inclusion, and equal participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of society.

CANADIAN CONTEXT AND LEGISLATION

In Canada, accessibility and disability rights are supported through the **Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms**, the **Canadian Human Rights Act**, and the **Accessible Canada Act (ACA)**. Enacted in 2019, the ACA aims to create a barrier-free Canada by 2040 through the identification, removal, and prevention of barriers. The Act emphasizes dignity, equal opportunity, accessibility, inclusion, self-determination, and the meaningful involvement of people with disabilities in decisions that affect them.

According to the 2022 Canadian Survey on Disability, 27% of Canadians aged 15 and older identify as having a disability. Disabilities may be visible or invisible, temporary or permanent, and can affect people at any stage of life.

B.C. CONTEXT AND LEGISLATION

The **Accessible British Columbia Act** (2021) recognizes that barriers to accessibility may be physical, technological, communication-based, systemic, or attitudinal.

Under the Act, school districts are required to maintain an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a public feedback process to support continuous improvement in accessibility and inclusion.

Accessibility planning in B.C. is guided by six principles:

- Adaptability – recognizing that accessibility needs evolve over time.
- Collaboration – promoting shared responsibility and partnership.
- Diversity – respecting the varied identities and experiences of people with disabilities.
- Inclusion – supporting full and equitable participation.
- Self-Determination – empowering people to make their own choices.
- Universal Design – creating environments and services that are accessible to the greatest extent possible for everyone.

SECTION 3 - FRAMEWORK GUIDING OUR WORK (CONTINUED)

NLPS PRINCIPLES

Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools believes every person has the right to belong, grow, and thrive. Accessibility is essential to creating learning and working environments where everyone feels welcomed, valued, and supported. These principles guide our commitment to removing barriers, promoting equity, and ensuring meaningful participation for all members of our learning community.

1. INCLUSION AND BELONGING

Everyone deserves to feel welcomed, valued, respected, and included. Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools is committed to creating environments where people of all abilities can participate fully in learning, work, and community life.

2. CHALLENGING ABLEISM

We are committed to identifying and removing ableism in our schools and workplaces. This includes addressing barriers, stereotypes, assumptions, and practices that create inequitable experiences for people with disabilities.

3. CONTINUOUS LEARNING AND ADAPTABILITY

Accessibility is an ongoing journey. As technology, services, and community needs evolve, we will continue to learn, adapt, and improve our practices to better support all members of our community.

4. HONOURING DIVERSITY

Every person brings unique strengths, identities, and experiences. We value the diversity of our learning community and recognize that lived experiences shape how people experience inclusion and accessibility.

5. DISABILITY AND DIVERSE ABILITIES

We recognize disability as a valued part of human diversity. People with disabilities and diverse abilities contribute unique strengths, perspectives, and gifts to our learning communities and deserve opportunities to learn, contribute, lead, and succeed.

6. EQUITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

We recognize that barriers are experienced differently. Accessibility planning must consider how disability intersects with other identities and experiences and support equitable outcomes for all.

7. COLLABORATION AND SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Creating accessible and inclusive communities is a shared responsibility. Working together with students, staff, families, Indigenous partners, and community organizations helps create opportunities for everyone to participate, contribute, and reach their potential.

SECTION 4 – THE COMMITTEE

PURPOSE OF THE ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE

The Accessibility Committee works collaboratively to assess and improve accessibility throughout the school district, focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities and diverse abilities, while encompassing the whole community. The Accessibility Committee advises district staff regarding strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory and other barriers that impact all aspects of school community life.

SECTION 4 – THE COMMITTEE (CONTINUED)

ACCESSIBILITY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, the selection of accessibility committee members must, to the extent possible, align with the following goals:

- At least half the members are persons with disabilities (PWD), or individuals who support or are from organizations that support PWDs;
- At least one member is an Indigenous person; and
- Members reflect the diversity of persons in B.C.

In NLPS, the Accessibility Committee Membership includes district staff from the learning services, human resources, health and safety, communications and facilities departments, as well as representation from the Nanaimo District Teachers' Association (NDTA), CUPE Support Staff, the Nanaimo School Administrators' Association (NSAA), a therapist from the School-Aged Therapy Program, and the parent of a student with a disability. The committee also includes representation from local First Nations and the urban Indigenous community and is committed to continuing to strengthen these relationships over time.

SECTION 5 – CONSULTATION CONDUCTED

In preparing this Accessibility Plan, the committee engaged our community by:

- Inviting students, staff and community members to share their experiences at Accessibility Committee meetings.
- Surveying parents and community members regarding playground accessibility across the district and broader community.
- Collaborating with the District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) to develop playground accessibility guidelines.
- Consulting with principals and vice-principals to support updates to the classroom accessibility matrix.
- Reviewing submissions to the feedback mechanism on the school district webpage.

The feedback we gathered was instrumental in identifying priority areas and has directly shaped the areas of focus for the 2026-2029 plan.

SECTION 6 – FEEDBACK MECHANISM

NLPS is committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide equitable treatment to people with disabilities in a way that respects their dignity. We encourage our staff, families, community members and people with disabilities to provide feedback as disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

The school district website includes an online tool that allows individuals to offer feedback both anonymously, or with their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted. There is also an option for people to upload a video, voice recording or photo(s).

SECTION 7 – ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS & BARRIERS

The inaugural NLPS Accessibility Plan (2023-2026) identified four key areas of focus.
Following is a description of the district's progress toward these priorities.

PRIORITY #1
EMPLOYMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY PRACTICES

Accomplishments:

- Gathered perspectives on accessibility needs and opportunities for improvement related to mental health supports, website communication, and supports for students with physical, hearing, and vision-related needs.
- Explored students' experiences and sustainable approaches to reducing barriers through dialogue with guest speakers, including a parent of a kindergarten student with diverse abilities and disabilities, a Community Inclusion Youth Worker, and a School Psychologist.
- Delivered accessibility awareness sessions during a district professional development day through a partnership between a Director of Instruction, an Occupational Therapist, and the CUPE and NDTA Professional Development Committees.

Barriers:

- Consistent communication and training across a large and complex organization remains challenging, creating barriers to ensuring all staff receive ongoing accessibility information, updates, and learning opportunities.
- Awareness and understanding of neurodiversity and the full spectrum of accessibility needs continue to vary, highlighting the need for greater shared understanding across the organization.
- Opportunities exist to strengthen collaboration and engagement with key stakeholder groups, including the NSAA, NDTA, and CUPE, to support a more coordinated approach to accessibility planning and implementation.

PRIORITY #2
THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Accomplishments:

- Completed a Universal Accessibility Built Environment Analysis at every school site to identify strengths, gaps, and priorities and inform a district workplan for addressing accessibility gaps. This was further enhanced through a more detailed gap analysis at two sites which will inform the development of future district-wide accessibility standards and guidelines.
- Implemented the Built Environment Prioritization Matrix to support shared decision-making and clear system-wide priorities. This matrix supports equitable and consistent decision-making by considering factors such as health and safety, urgency, need, belonging, cost, funding, and universal benefit.
- Added an Accessibility category to the facilities work order system to better identify, track, and prioritize accessibility-related requests.
- Enhanced capital and maintenance projects by incorporating accessibility features that were not included in the original scope of work.
- Completed several long-standing accessibility projects, reducing the backlog of accessibility improvements across the district.
- Collaborated with the District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) to develop playground accessibility guidelines.
- Engaged parents and caregivers of students experiencing accessibility barriers to better understand playground access needs and inform future planning.

Barriers:

- Competing priorities, financial pressures, and staffing constraints can make it difficult to identify and advance accessibility initiatives at the desired pace.
- The ongoing demand for facility maintenance and repair work can limit capacity to address accessibility improvements and upgrades.
- Many district facilities were not originally designed with modern accessibility standards in mind, creating challenges that require complex and costly retrofits.
- Accessibility planning, implementation, and monitoring can be time-intensive, creating a need for streamlined processes and efficiencies to support sustainable progress.

SECTION 7 – ACCESSIBILITY ACCOMPLISHMENTS & BARRIERS (CONTINUED)

PRIORITY #3
INCLUSION, MENTAL HEALTH AND PEER CONNECTIONS

Accomplishments:

- Developed and refined a Student Accessibility Considerations matrix that outlines universal accessibility practices for classrooms, gyms, and outdoor learning spaces to support equitable access for students with diverse abilities and disabilities, with district-wide implementation planned for 2025–2026.
- Planned and delivered capacity-building opportunities to support implementation of the matrix and align accessibility efforts with the district's strategic goals.
- Strengthened welcoming and inclusive school environments that foster student connection, belonging, and participation.
- Engaged school teams in an Accessible Play Challenge to explore and implement more inclusive play opportunities, while collecting and sharing promising practices from across the district.
- Advanced accessible play opportunities by initiating the installation of communication boards on playgrounds across the district to support communication, participation, and inclusion for all learners. The first communication board was unveiled on June 1, 2026.
- Refreshed processes for student transitions, including transitions between programs, between schools, and from elementary to secondary school, to promote continuity of support and a stronger sense of belonging for students and families.

Barriers:

- Student perspectives need to be more directly represented in accessibility planning and decision-making, to ensure initiatives reflect the experiences and needs of learners.
- Connections between accessibility work and broader provincial priorities are still emerging, including alignment with the BC K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan and the Mental Health in Schools Strategy.
- Representation of individuals with lived experience on the committee remains limited, expansion will strengthen the inclusion of diverse perspectives in planning and decision-making.
- Connections between accessibility work and the district's Staff and Student Wellness goals are continuing to evolve, creating opportunities for greater alignment and shared planning.

PRIORITY #4
INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

Accomplishments:

- Enhanced website accessibility by launching a new external website with prominent accessibility navigation, a dedicated accessibility landing page, text-to-speech and translation tools.
- Strengthened feedback and accountability by creating a website reporting tool that allows members of the public and employees to identify and report accessibility concerns.
- Developed accessibility resources by continuing work on an Accessibility Style Guide and plain-language communication guidelines to support staff in creating more accessible digital and print materials.
- Promoted awareness and inclusion by recognizing National AccessAbility Week (June 1–8, 2026) for the first time, unveiling the district's first communication board at Fairview School on June 1, 2026.

Barriers:

- Greater awareness of the district's accessibility feedback process will support stakeholders and rights holders in sharing their experiences regarding accessibility needs and barriers.
- Establishing a sustainable process for reviewing, tracking, and responding to accessibility feedback is needed to ensure timely and consistent follow-up.
- Meaningful engagement with external partner organizations and communities requires ongoing coordination and relationship-building. This includes ongoing consultation with local Indigenous Nations, Central Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS), local mental health agencies, and other community stakeholders.

SECTION 8 – THREE YEAR PLAN

This plan will center the voice of individuals with diverse abilities and disabilities, encourage shared responsibility, and focus on system level changes:

1. WORKFORCE & INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

- Strengthen staff knowledge and skills through focused professional learning opportunities
- Embed accessibility and equity into everyday school level decisions, where impact is greatest

2. ACCESSIBLE LEARNING & PHYSICAL SPACES

- Monitor the needs identified through gap-analysis processes and implement an annual review process to identify, monitor, and address physical and learning environment barriers
- Establish and implement clear playground guidelines to support inclusive participation for all students

3. TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION & SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

- Increase representation on the Accessibility Committee from individuals with lived experience and district staff who are positioned to act on the committee's recommendations.
- Clearly communicate expectations and purpose around accessibility, supporting a shared understanding of "why" this work matters
- Elevate student voice as an essential part of identifying barriers and shaping solutions
- Improve clarity, transparency, and engagement with families, staff, key stakeholders, and the broader community

The priorities outlined in this plan provide a framework for ongoing action, reflection, and improvement as the district continues to create more accessible and inclusive learning and working environments.

SECTION 9 - MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The committee follows an annual monitoring and evaluation cycle, consisting of a fall work-plan and annual update in the spring.

The workplan will be shared at a board meeting in October, outlining the specific areas of focus and intended action steps for the Accessibility Committee's work.

Each May, an annual update will provide a description of the work completed during the school year, as well as refreshed for the following school year. This will be shared in both a public board meeting, and on the school district website.

APPENDIX A: ABOUT DISABILITY



SECTION 10 – CONCLUSION

Accessibility is an essential part of Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools' commitment to creating welcoming, inclusive, and equitable learning and working environments. The progress outlined in this report reflects ongoing efforts to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility through collaboration, continuous improvement, and meaningful engagement.

These efforts support the district's strategic priorities of student success, equity and inclusion, staff and student wellness, and strong relationships with Indigenous rights holders, families, and community partners.

By working together to identify and remove barriers, we will continue to create learning and working environments where everyone can belong, grow, and thrive.



REFERENCES

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- British Columbia. (2021). Accessible British Columbia Act, SBC 2021, c. 19.
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- Government of Canada. (2019). Accessible Canada Act (S.C. 2019, c. 10). Justice Laws Website.
- United Nations. (2006). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. United Nations.

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

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.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped".
- Unless it is an emergency, only touch the person if you have been given permission.
- If you offer assistance, wait until your receive permission. Offer your arm (the elbow) to guide the person and walk slowly.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- 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.
- When entering a room, show the individual to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Ensure you say good-bye prior to leaving the individual.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

HARD OF HEARING AND DEAFNESS

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 hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating. While some people may use sign language, notes or hearing aids when communicating, others may also use email, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people who are deaf or hard of hearing:

- Always ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using 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.
- Keep your face clearly visible when speaking.

- Be clear and precise when giving directions and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Make sure you have been understood.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- 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 rather than someone who is with them. People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped”.
- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistive devices, including wheelchairs.
- 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.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using 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, ask again.
- Give one piece of information at a time.
- Be polite and patient.
- Speak directly to the person, not to someone who is with the person.

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 disabilities or disabilities:

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Recognize that some people with communication difficulties use augmentative communication systems such as Signed English and Picture Exchange System.
- 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.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using 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 consider ation 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 communication challenges. 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, sign language 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; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you don't understand, ask the person to repeat the information.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using 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 they need to get their point across.
- Allow the individual to finish their sentences themselves without interruption.
- Patience, respect and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.

DEAF-BLIND DISABILITIES

A person who is deafblind cannot see or hear to some extent. This results in greater difficulties in accessing information and managing daily activities. Most people who are deafblind 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 deafblind:

- Make no assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Some deaf-blind people have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using 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 communi cate 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.
- Unless it's an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

APPENDIX B: SUGGESTED REFERENCES/RESOURCES

Accessibility context and planning help for schools and school boards. Find out more