

# TORONTO BOTANICAL GARDEN

## VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK EXTRACT

### Welcome!!

The staff (and existing volunteers) of the Toronto Botanical Garden staff welcome you! We hope you enjoy your volunteer experience with this worthy not for profit organization!

Volunteers are essential to all aspects of Toronto Botanical Garden. We would not be where we are today without the dedication, commitment, integrity and professionalism of our volunteers.

This Volunteer handbook is a resource guide to provide you with information about Toronto Botanical Garden, including descriptions of our core programs, services, general staff and volunteer responsibilities.

Welcome to the Toronto Botanical Garden volunteer team.

### Mandate

Toronto Botanical Garden (TBG), formerly the Civic Garden Centre, was founded in 1958 and incorporated in 1963. We are a volunteer-based, charitable organization whose **mission** is to connect people to plants, fostering sustainable communities and developing reciprocal relationships with nature through lifelong learning.

Our **vision** is to be a garden for all; a diverse community that recognizes the life-giving role of nature, working together for a more sustainable world.

### History

- 1827: Alexander Milne, a loyalist, settled on the site and built several mills which his family operated for over 100 years.
- 1944: Rupert E. Edwards purchased the property and transformed it into a private garden and golf course.
- 1956: Mr. Edwards sold the property to the City of Toronto for \$153,000 to protect it from residential development. 'Edwards Gardens' was officially opened to the public, with the name reflecting the fact Mr. Edwards could have received more money by selling to developers.
- 1958: The Garden Club of Toronto and the Federation of Ontario Naturalists were headquartered in the old Milne House on the property.
- 1962: Milne House was destroyed by fire and Metro Council approved funds to establish the Civic Garden Centre in a building to be owned and maintained by Metro.

- 1964: The building designed by Raymond Moriyama was completed. Funding was provided by the Garden Club of Toronto and the Meadowvale Botanical Garden Trust, with \$100,000 from Metropolitan Toronto.
- 1976: An addition designed by Jerome Markson was officially opened in December.
- 1998: Opening of the Teaching Garden in Edwards Garden – a children’s education project envisioned and donated by the Garden Club of Toronto.
- 2005: \$6 million in renovations and additions to the original buildings were completed with 20% City of Toronto funding and 80% private funding, including a lead gift from Kathy and George Dembroski for whom the Centre for Horticulture is now named. The building includes the Weston Family Library, James Boyd Children’s Centre and the Garden Shop at TBG.

## **General Information**

TBG is open 7 days a week for 51 weeks of the year. Operating funds are generated through parking, membership dues, foundation grants, facility rentals, plant sales, garden shop, course fees, special events, lectures and donations.

The facilities are owned by the City of Toronto, which provides a grant of \$25,000 per year to assist with maintenance, plus paying for heat and hydro and major maintenance.

TBG is governed by a volunteer board that determines TBG’s direction and policies. TBG is staffed by a small group of paid employees who manage the day to day operations. TBG departments include Horticulture, Learning, Marketing & Audience Engagement, Retail, and Development (membership, grants and donations). Other units or areas within the departments include the library, maintenance, rentals, and of course volunteers/tours. For up-to-date information on who is who please visit our website.

The departments are supported by volunteers in a wide variety of roles ranging from regular year round services (Reception, Weston Family Library and the Garden Shop), to seasonal roles including Gardening and Tour Guide roles, as well as assisting in delivery of Adult and Children’s Education and representing TBG at fund raising and special events.

TBG relies upon volunteers to help run our many programs and to meet our vision. Our volunteers take a great deal of pride in the many contributions they make and often form close teams and enjoy each other's company for many years!

This handbook extract provides more information on what it means to be a volunteer at TBG, volunteer commitment and the volunteer code of conduct.

Detailed role descriptions are available upon request.

## **Programs and Services Offered by TBG**

### **Adult Education: Courses and Programs**

Over 40 gardening and horticulture related courses are offered each trimester (Fall, Winter/Spring, Summer). TBG area: Adult Education

### **Horticultural Services**

A garden information telephone line is answered regularly by Toronto Master Gardeners. The Toronto Master Gardeners provide an “Ask a Master Gardener” service accessed on their website [www.torontomastergardeners.ca](http://www.torontomastergardeners.ca).

### **Lecture Series**

TBG offers monthly evening lectures featuring well-known speakers from around the world. TBG dept: Adult Education

### **Weston Family Library**

The Weston Family Library at TBG is Canada’s largest private horticultural library with over 9,000 books, 70 periodicals and a large collection of clippings, pamphlets, nursery and seed catalogues as well as a collection of children’s gardening books. The Library also has a growing collection of videos and CDs. The public may use the Library and members have free borrowing privileges. There is also a special booklovers membership category. The book catalogue and the subject index are available on-line at our website. TBG dept: Library (part of Learning dept.).

### **Major Fundraising and Special Events**

TBG offers many special events throughout the calendar year, providing opportunities for volunteers to get involved (wide variety of roles). Some of TBG’s main events are:

#### **Get the Jump on Spring & Seedy Saturday**

Taking place in early Spring, this annual horticultural societies Open House features speakers, workshops, and exhibits, all designed to educate and inspire gardening enthusiasts for the gardening year ahead. The Seedy Saturday component is an opportunity to purchase seeds from a variety of suppliers as well as swap seeds (and contribute to the seed bank). The event is run by a volunteer committee, assisted by TBG staff. TBG dept: Learning.

#### **The Plant Sale**

Held for 4-5 days in May. TBG dept: Retail and Horticulture.

## **Through the Garden Gate**

A very popular private garden tour attracting many visitors each year. This event is organized and run by volunteers and staff and is usually held on the second weekend in June. TBG dept: Marketing and Audience Engagement.

## **Rentals**

Any of the studios and auditoriums are available for rent for meetings, weddings, or special exhibits. TBG dept: Rentals

**TBG Kids Education** offers programs for children from preschool to grade 6. Programs include curriculum-linked class visits during the school year, March break camp, summer camps, and a series of nature events. TBG dept: Children's Education.

**TBG Adult Education** offers a selection of workshops, seminars, symposiums and monthly TBG lectures. TBG dept: Learning.

**The Garden Shop** offers unique gifts, floral art supplies and gardening books. TBG dept: Retail

## **Trellis Magazine**

This is a three to four issue per year on line magazine full of interesting articles and a calendar of events. The magazine has advertising opportunities for organizations who wish to promote their product, service or event (also advertising options on the TBG website). TBG dept: Marketing & Audience Engagement.

## **Tours:**

Tours are led by experienced volunteer tour guides and take place in the following locations:

### **TBG and Edwards Gardens Tours**

Pre booked, pre pay 90 minute tours are offered regularly from May to October (frequency depends on availability of tour guides). Tours cover the highlights of the plant collection and local history. Private group tours may also be booked.

**Ravine Tours** – on offer from Spring through Fall, providing visitors' with an experience of the beauty and also the challenges of these unique spaces. Approx. 1 hour into Wilket Creek ravine, rugged terrain, steps and slopes.

## What it means to be a TBG Volunteer

### TBG's commitment to our Volunteers

The TBG Board and staff commit to adhering to the values, guiding principles and standards of practice in the **Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement (CCVI)**. The CCVI principles state that **volunteers have rights**. As a nonprofit organization we recognize that volunteers are a vital human resource and commit to appropriate infrastructure to support volunteer engagement. The CCVI principles also state that **volunteers have responsibilities**; you make a commitment and are accountable to the organization. These rights and responsibilities are captured below. More on the CCVI can be found on [www.volunteer.ca/content/canadian-code-volunteer-involvement](http://www.volunteer.ca/content/canadian-code-volunteer-involvement).

### Volunteer rights: As a volunteer you can expect:

- Full cooperation and appreciation from TBG staff;
- A dedicated resource (s) to manage the volunteer program and act as a liaison between volunteers and TBG. This resource is there to help make your volunteer experience be the best one possible, to provide you with:
  - ⤴ information about your role, help answer any questions you may have and receive feedback from you about your volunteer experience.
  - ⤴ feedback about your performance in your volunteer role
  - ⤴ a written volunteer role description;
  - ⤴ orientation, basic and role specific training, and additional learning opportunities;
  - ⤴ recognition of your volunteer efforts; and
  - ⤴ an up-to-date sign-up site for all volunteer opportunities.

### Benefits of Volunteering at TBG

- Make friends and connect with like minded people;
- Volunteer in beautiful surroundings alongside experienced staff and volunteers;
- Have a rewarding and fulfilling experience with opportunities for intellectual and personal enrichment;
- Full training for all roles and pre-event orientation;
- Contribute to your community;
- Early access to special event tickets and discounts for some Adult Ed courses;
- Recognition for your contribution;
- Reciprocal admissions to cultural organizations across Toronto and Ontario;
- Use of self-service on line sign-up for volunteer opportunities/scheduling that provides immediate confirmation of booking and timely reminders; and
- Free parking for the calendar year in which you commenced volunteering (for volunteers who are not TBG members).

## **Volunteer Reward and Recognition**

TBG provides recognition for volunteer achievement and contribution in a variety of ways. These include educational events (lunch and learns, seminars and tours especially for TBG volunteers, specific training pre special event, and/or during ongoing volunteer roles).

Volunteers with long service will be recognized at volunteer appreciation event (s) and on TBG's website.

In addition individual volunteers and/or volunteer groups will be celebrated in Trellis and on TBG's website.

Each volunteer group has occasional lunches/social gatherings.

## **Volunteer Commitment to TBG**

### **Volunteer responsibilities: TBG asks all its volunteers to:**

- Attend initial and update training sessions
- Respond with timely use of volunteer scheduling system or timely completion of volunteer hours log forms (if not using volunteer scheduling system)
- Read all email communications (and provide timely response if requested).
- Accept any feedback in the spirit in which it is provided, namely to help you become the best in your volunteer role.
- Accept, support and comply with:
  - **TBG policies, programs and practices** as outlined in this handbook (health and safety, harassment, accessible visitor service plan & manual, confidentiality, etc.)
  - The **TBG volunteer code of conduct** (below). In particular, demonstrate respect for the public, staff and other volunteers.
  - **Support TBG's environmental sustainability and ecological restoration endeavours.** TBG is committed to environmental sustainability education and action. All TBG employees and volunteers are expected to contribute to and support TBG's greening initiatives, which help to reduce the organization's ecological footprint. This may include learning about and participating in related discussions and activities. Thank you for your role in ensuring TBG becomes a hub for environmental sustainability and ecological restoration.

## **TBG Volunteer Code of Conduct**

It is Toronto Botanical Garden's (TBG's) role to serve its membership and the public at large. In this regard, all volunteers are expected to treat members and the public with a high degree of courtesy, efficiency and professionalism at all times and under all circumstances. All volunteers must keep in mind that they represent Toronto Botanical Garden and that their attitude, appearance and behaviour reflects on TBG and its image. Improper conduct will not be tolerated (also see feedback section below).

If you find yourself in a situation which is difficult and cannot be handled within your comfort level or degree of TBG knowledge, you should remove yourself from the situation before responding inappropriately and should refer the problem to the Head of Volunteer Services (or another TBG staff member).

**Customer Service:** As a service organization, TBG depends on all volunteers to display a high degree of customer service at all times to members and the public at large.

**Cooperation:** The Toronto Botanical Garden is a multifaceted organization and, as such, workloads can vary from department to department. Volunteers may be asked to help other departments when required and with a cooperative spirit.

**Dress Code:** As representatives of Toronto Botanical Garden, all volunteers must be dressed appropriately for their volunteer role and wear identifying TBG name tags at all times. For volunteers in customer service roles, appearance must be always neatly attired and cleanly groomed when on duty.

**Timeliness and Dependability:** All volunteers are expected to be on time for their shift, punctual with respect to meetings, lunch breaks and other scheduled activities. **Dependability:** All volunteer roles are important in the delivery of our events and services. Many volunteers operate as members of teams and these teams rely on members to be dependable (as well as timely) in order to provide smooth and efficient customer service. Dependability also means staying focused on your specific role for the duration of your shift, using your best judgement in carrying out your role and checking with a TBG staff member before changing the parameters of that role/switching roles.

**Feedback:** TBG values feedback from you after events/programs and about your volunteer experience. Please feel free to email the Volunteer office or provide feedback in person.

TBG also aims to provide you with feedback on your performance in your role, with the goal of ensuring the volunteering experience is the best it can be for all parties. In the event that a volunteer's skills/capabilities or attitude are not a good match for a role TBG reserves the right to redeploy to another role and/or remove that volunteer from the active listing.

## **TBG POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

### **Health and Safety Policy**

TBG is committed to the health and safety of its employees and volunteers. TBG is ultimately responsible for the health and safety of volunteers while working with us. TBG management will make every reasonable effort to provide a safe and healthy work environment in accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act.

As a volunteer you are entitled to adequate training and supervision in your specific volunteer assignment(s) for the purpose of protecting your health and safety.

Volunteers must protect their health and safety, and that of their fellow volunteers and TBG staff, by working in compliance with the law and the safe work practices and procedures established by TBG.

It is in the best interest of everyone to consider health and safety a priority in every activity.

### **Workplace Harassment:**

Every volunteer has a right to be free of discrimination, harassment and bullying in the workplace by the organization, its employees, its volunteers or by an agent of the organization because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, handicap, age, marital status, family status or record of offenses (prohibited by the Ontario Human Rights Code).

Discrimination, harassment and bullying are an assault on an individual's dignity and may result in negative consequences for an individual in term of health and personal safety and for the organization in terms of poor morale and decreased productivity.

If you experience a situation that makes you uncomfortable contact the Head, Volunteer Services or the TBG staff member whose department you are volunteering for. Workplace harassment is grounds for dismissal.

### **Additional Guidelines/Policies**

**Smoking;** The City's smoking by-law prohibits smoking within 9 meters of a building. We have installed 3 metal tubular ashtrays – three-foot tall, silver-grey tubes with the labelled “Smoking Outpost”. One is in the Westview Terrace, one outside our front-door entrance and one outside the loading bay area. There is absolutely NO smoking near or in the garden straw bale shed, or the compost piles. We ask that you please adhere to this policy and assist others do so as well.



**Media and Reporters:** If any media personnel approach you without being accompanied by a TBG staff member, please report their presence immediately to our Marketing & Communications Department, or if no one is available there, to our Executive Director. We ask that you not speak to the media on behalf of the TBG.

**Alcohol:** It is against the law for any person to drink alcohol on the property of the Toronto Botanical Garden without a proper license. While volunteering for us and/or wearing your volunteer name badge/apron, volunteers must not drink alcohol. Please remember to return your TBG apron at end of your shift, and to take off your name badge when not on duty.

**Parking at the Garden:** All volunteers driving to the Toronto Botanical Garden are requested to park in the main parking lot, just south of the building. Access to this parking lot is off Leslie street, or Lawrence Ave West. There is absolutely NO parking in the Deliveries Entrance area.

Parking is free for TBG members (one of the many benefits of membership), and we sincerely hope that TBG volunteers will consider extending their support by becoming TBG members. TBG will also offer free parking to all TBG volunteers for the first calendar year when they joined as a volunteer, after which time we sincerely hope they will consider becoming a member!

## **Accessible Visitor Service Plan and Manual**

In accordance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005 and the customer service standards required by the Act, all volunteers in roles where there is interaction with members of the public must be aware of and in agreement with TBG's Accessible Visitor Service Plan and Manual.

### **Accessible Visitor Service Plan**

**Guiding principles:** fostering independence, dignity, integration and equal opportunity

Toronto Botanical Garden is committed to excellence in serving all visitors including people with disabilities. Additionally, customized tours are available for groups with special needs.

#### **Assistive devices**

We will ensure that our staff and volunteers are trained and familiar with assistive devices that may be used by visitors with disabilities while they are at TBG.

#### **Communication**

We will communicate with people with disabilities in ways that take their disability into account.

#### **Service animals**

We welcome people with disabilities and their service animals. Service animals are allowed in all parts of our premises that are open to the public.

#### **Support persons**

A person with a disability who is accompanied by a support person will be allowed to have their support person accompany them to all parts of our premises that are open to the public.

Fees will not be charged for support persons who accompany someone with a disability solely to facilitate their participation in TBG programs and classes. (Otherwise, the support person will be charged the usual fee for the program or class.) We will notify customers of this through a notice posted at Reception, published in our Program Guides and quarterly magazine, and on TBG's website.

#### **Notice of temporary disruption**

In the event of a planned or unexpected disruption to services or facilities for visitors with disabilities, TBG will give notice promptly. Our clearly posted notice will include information about the reason for the disruption, its anticipated length of time, and a description of alternative facilities or services, if available. This notice will be placed at all TBG entrances and posted on TBG's website.

### **Training for staff and volunteers**

TBG will provide accessible visitor service training to all staff and volunteers who deal with the public.

#### **Training will include:**

- an overview of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005 and the customer service standards required by the Act;
- TBG's accessible visitor service plan;
- guidance in how to:
  - interact and communicate with people with various types of disabilities;
  - interact with people with disabilities who use an assistive device or require the assistance of a service animal or a support person;
- re-training whenever any changes are made to TBG's accessible visitor service plan.

#### **Feedback process**

Visitors who wish to provide feedback on the way TBG welcomes and assists people with disabilities are welcome to email, fill out a feedback card at Reception, or give their comments to a TBG staff member in person. All feedback will be directed to TBG's Director of Marketing and Communications. Correspondents can expect TBG's response to any concern within two business days. Complaints will be addressed according to our organization's regular complaint management procedures.

#### **Modifications to this or other policies**

Any TBG policy that does not respect and promote the dignity and independence of people with disabilities will be amended or removed.

# Toronto Botanical Garden

## Accessible Visitor Service Manual

### General context

We want every visitor, guest, student or partner to leave TBG feeling really glad they were here, whether a person has a disability or not. Everyone deserves the same friendly, respectful help to take advantage of all the opportunities at TBG.

- Always **put the person first**, not their disability. A disability is only one aspect of a life; it's not the whole person. Always think of, and refer to, a "person with a disability," not "a disabled person."
- Take care with vocabulary; think and speak with **respect**. Don't use old or judgmental terms such as "handicap," "handicapped," "crippled," "retarded" or "dumb." These words are now considered disrespectful. Use "disability" or "disabled."
- If you are not sure about the type or level of a disability, wait until the individual informs you of their situation; **don't make assumptions**. Some types of disabilities have similar characteristics, and assumptions may easily be wrong.

### General tips on providing service to visitors with disabilities

- If you're not sure what to do, just ask "may I help you?" Visitors with disabilities know whether they need help and how you can most readily provide it.
- Speak directly to the visitor, not to his or her support person or companion.
- Avoid stereotypes; don't make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities a person has. Some disabilities are not visible or immediately apparent.
- Take the time to get to know each visitor's needs, and focus on meeting those needs, just as you would with any other visitor.
- Be patient and listen carefully. People with some types of disabilities may need a little more time to process and respond.
- Learn the appropriate language and terminology to use when referring to people with disabilities.
- If you can't understand what a customer is saying, politely ask them to tell you again.
- Never touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to keep their focus.
- Don't touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without permission.

## **Visitors who have vision loss**

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 to perceive objects straight ahead. Some people can see the outlines of objects; others can see light sources and levels. Vision loss can restrict customers' abilities to read signs, locate landmarks or notice hazards. Some customers 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.

### **Interacting/communicating**

- Don't assume the person can't see you.
- Don't touch the visitor without asking permission.
- Offer your elbow to guide the person. If he or she accepts, walk slowly, but wait for permission before doing so. Lead – don't pull.
- Identify landmarks or details to orient the visitor to the environment around him/her.
- Don't touch or speak to service animals – they are working and have to focus at all times.
- Don't leave your visitor in the middle of a room. Show him or her to a chair or other comfortable, anchor location such as a counter.
- If you need to leave your visitor, let him/her know you're leaving and that you'll be back soon.
- Identify yourself when you approach your visitor and speak directly to him or her, even if he/she is accompanied by a companion.
- There is usually no need to raise your voice; a person with vision loss doesn't necessarily have hearing loss. Say your name even if you know the person well, as many voices sound similar.
- Be clear and precise when giving directions – e.g., two steps behind you, a meter to your left, etc. Don't use "over there" or point.
- If you're uncertain about how best to provide directions, ask the person how to do so.
- Don't be afraid or embarrassed to use words such as "see", "read" and "look." People with vision loss also use these words.
- When providing printed information, offer to read or describe or summarize.

## **Visitors who are Deaf, oral deaf, deafened or hard of hearing**

People who are profoundly deaf may identify themselves as *culturally Deaf* or *oral deaf*. In Deaf culture, indicated by a capital "D," the term is used to describe a person who has severe to profound hearing loss, with little or no hearing.

*Oral deaf* is used to describe a person who was born deaf or became deaf before learning to speak, but is taught to speak and may not typically use American Sign Language.

*Deafened* describes a person who has lost their hearing slowly or suddenly in adulthood. Such a person may use visual cues such as captioning or computerized note-taking, speech reading or sign language.

*Hard of hearing* describes a person who uses their residual hearing and speech to communicate. The person may communicate by speech reading, hearing aids, sign language and/or communication devices.

**Types of assistance** customers may use: 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.

### **Interacting/communicating**

- Attract the visitor's attention before speaking. Generally, the best way is with a gentle wave of your hand, a warm preliminary "hello," or if absolutely necessary, a gentle touch on the hand.
- Ask how you can help. Don't shout.
- Move to a well-lit area where the visitor can see your face.
- Don't put your hands in front of your face when speaking. Some people read lips.
- If necessary, ask if another way to communicate would be easier, for example, using a pen and paper.
- Be patient if you are using a pen and paper to communicate. American Sign Language may be the visitor's first language. It has its own grammatical rules and sentence structure.
  - Look at and speak directly to the visitor. Address the visitor, not his/her support person.
  - Be clear and precise when giving directions, and repeat or rephrase if necessary. Confirm that the visitor understands you.
  - If the person uses a hearing aid, reduce background noise or move to a quieter area, if possible, so the person can hear or concentrate better.
  - Don't assume that the visitor knows sign language or reads lips.

### **Visitors who are deaf blind**

A person who is deaf blind can neither see nor hear to some degree. Many people who are deaf blind will be accompanied by an intervener, a professional who helps with communicating.

**Types of assistance** visitors may use: Braille, large print, print on paper (black felt marker on non-glossy white paper or using portable white and black boards), communication boards, hearing aid, monocular or magnifiers, TTY devices, white cane, service animal, support person.

### **Interacting/communicating**

- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Some people who are deaf blind have some sight or hearing, while others have neither.

- A visitor who is deaf blind is likely to explain to you how to communicate with him or her or give you an assistance card or a note explaining how to communicate with him or her.
- Identify yourself to the intervener when you approach a visitor who is deaf blind, but then speak directly to the visitor as you normally would, not to the intervener.
- Don't touch or address service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Don't suddenly touch a person who is deaf blind or touch them without permission.

### **Visitors with physical disabilities**

Only some people with physical disabilities use a visible assistive device. Someone with a spinal cord injury, arthritis, heart or lung conditions or amputation may manage quite independently but have difficulty with moving, standing, sitting or walking longer distances.

### **Interacting/communicating**

- Ask before you help. People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things.
- Respect the visitor's personal space. Do not lean over him/her or on his/her assistive device.
- If you need to have a conversation of more than 30 seconds or so with someone who uses a wheelchair or a scooter, sit down so you can make eye contact at the same level.
- If you have permission to move a person's wheelchair, don't leave them in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position, such as facing away from other people or in the path of opening doors.
- Speak naturally and directly to the visitor, not to his or her companion or support person.
- Don't touch personal items or equipment such as canes or wheelchairs without permission.
- Keep devices and equipment – your institution's items or the customer's personal items such as canes and walkers – within the visitor's convenient reach.
- If you have permission to move a person in a wheelchair, remember to:
  - Wait for and follow the person's instructions;
  - Confirm that the visitor is ready to move;
  - Describe what you're going to do before you do it;
  - Avoid uneven ground and objects;
  - Don't leave the person in an awkward, dangerous or undignified position such as facing a wall or in the path of a doorway.

- Let the visitor know about accessible features in the immediate area (i.e., automatic doors, accessible washrooms, elevators, ramps, etc.)

### **Visitors with mental health disabilities**

Mental health disability is a broad term for many disorders that can range in severity. Mental health disabilities are not as visible as many other types of disabilities. You may not know that a visitor has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. If you sense or know that a customer has a mental health disability, be sure to treat them with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else. If someone is experiencing difficulty controlling his or her symptoms, or is in a crisis, stay calm and reassuring and ask the visitor how you can best help.

A person with a mental health disability may have difficulty with one, several or none of these challenges: difficulty with sequences in conventional logic, hallucinations, depression, sudden mood swings, difficulty concentrating or remembering, a seeming lack of motivation.

**Types of assistance** a visitor might use: service animal, support person. Some service animals used for companionship/reassurance may be small animals that can be kept close, in a pocket, such as a ferret.

### **Interacting/communicating**

- Treat anyone with a mental health disability with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be patient.
- Be confident and reassuring. Listen carefully and work with the visitor to try to meet their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to help.

### **Visitors who have 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 visitors with an intellectual or developmental disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and will always appreciate respectful treatment.

**Types of assistance** visitors may use: communication board, speech generating device, service animal, support person.

### **Interacting/communicating**

- Don't make any assumptions about what a person can or cannot do.
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.



- To confirm whether the visitor 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 visitor, not to their companion or support person.

### **Visitors who have learning disabilities**

The term “learning disability” describes a range of information processing disorders that can affect the way 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, only that they learn in a different way. Learning disabilities can result in different communication difficulties, which may be subtle, such as difficulty reading, or more pronounced. They can interfere with a visitor’s ability to receive, express or process information, but may nonetheless be difficult to detect. You may not know that a person has a learning disability unless you are told.

**Types of assistance** visitors may use: alternative technology for writing, calculator, scanning or reading devices, tape recorders, mini pocket recorders.

### **Interacting/communicating**

- When you see that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can help.
- Communicate by means of a method that takes into account the visitor’s disability.
- Speak naturally, clearly, and directly to the visitor.
- Allow extra time if necessary – the visitor may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Be patient and willing to explain something again if needed.

### **Visitors who have speech or language impairments**

Cerebral palsy, hearing loss or other conditions may make it difficult to pronounce words or cause slurring or stuttering. They also may prevent self-expression or the understanding of written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards or other assistive devices.

**Types of assistance** visitors may use: communication board, paper and pen, speech generating device, support person.

### **Interacting/communicating**

- Don't assume that because a person has one disability they also have another. For example, if a visitor has difficulty speaking, it doesn't mean they have an intellectual disability as well.
- Ask the visitor to repeat their information if you don't understand.
- Ask questions that can be answered "yes" or "no" if possible.
- Allow enough time to communicate at the visitor's own pace.
- Don't interrupt or finish the visitor's sentences. Wait for them to finish.

### **Interacting/communicating with people with disabilities over the phone**

- Introduce yourself clearly.
- Speak naturally, clearly and directly.
- Don't zone in on how the person's voice sounds. Concentrate on what they are saying.
- Don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences. Give the person time to explain or respond.
- If you don't understand, simply ask again, or repeat or rephrase what you heard and ask if you have understood correctly.
- If the person is using an interpreter or a relay service, speak naturally to the person, not to the interpreter.
- If you encounter a situation where you and the person on the phone cannot communicate with each other effectively due to the customer's disability, consider making alternate arrangements.
- If you cannot complete your interaction, clearly explain what will happen next. Make another appointment for a time when assistance will be available. Leave your contact information in case it will be needed in the meantime.