

**Council of Ontario Universities
Accessible Customer Service eLearning**

Module 3 Summary

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITIES

What is a service animal?

A service animal is any guide dog, signal dog or other animal individually trained to assist a person with a disability.

What do service animals do?

Each animal is trained to perform various tasks and provide a range of services.

- A **guide dog** serves as a travel aid for a person with vision loss.
- A **hearing or signal** animal alerts a person with hearing loss when a sound occurs, such as knock on the door or alarm.
- **Mobility assistance** animals may carry, fetch, open doors, ring doorbells, activate elevator buttons, pull a wheelchair, steady a person while walking or help someone get up after a fall.
- A **seizure response** animal warns a person of an impending seizure or provides aid during a seizure such as going for help or standing guard over the person.
- **Therapeutic assistance** animals aid people with cognitive or psychological disabilities by bringing a phone to the person in emergency, calling 911 or the suicide hotline, turning on the lights, fetching medication, barking for help in emergency or assisting a person with panic disorder coping in crowds.

What should you do when communicating and interacting with someone who uses a service animal?

- Do not request that the owner leave the animal in different location, such as outside of your office or classroom.
- Avoid petting or talking to a service animal: this distracts the animal from its tasks.
- Do not feed or offer treats to the animal.
- Avoid deliberately startling the animal.
- Remember not all service animals wear special collars or harnesses. If you are not sure and it is necessary that you verify, it is okay to ask the owner if it is a service animal.
- Remember that the owner is responsible for maintaining control over the animal at all time. You are not responsible for cleaning up after it or feeding it. You may provide water if the owner requests it.

Are there any locations on campus where service animals are not permitted?

Under the standard, universities must permit service animals in *all* areas to which the public normally have access. There are only a few exceptions where a service animal would be excluded by law, as in these examples.

- The *Health Protection and Promotion Act* (1990) does not allow animals in places where food is manufactured, prepared, processed, handled, served, displayed, stored, sold or offered for sale. However, the Act does contain specific exemptions for service dogs only, allowing them to accompany their owners into areas where food is normally served, sold or offered for sale.
- In some unique situations where the presence of the animal presents a significant risk for another person, say for example in cases of severe allergies, the university is required to meet the needs of both persons in these situations and would have to devise an accommodation plan that enables both persons to access services and goods accordingly.

- Some municipal by-laws restrict certain breeds of animals or dogs from the municipality and these by-laws apply even if the animal is acting as a service animal.

What is a support person?

A support person is someone either hired or chosen to help a person with a disability. A support person can be a personal support worker, a volunteer, a family member or spouse or a friend of the person with the disability. A support person in some cases does not necessarily need to have special training or qualifications.

Support persons may provide one or more types of assistance.

- Transportation
- Guiding a person with a vision loss
- Adaptive communication (e.g., intervenor for someone who is deafblind)
- Interpretation (e.g., ASL/English interpreter, LSQ/French interpreter)
- Note-taking, scribe or reading services (usually coordinated by Disability or Library Services Offices)
- Personal care assistance
- Support persons in the event of a seizure (e.g., protect from falls)
- Interpret and speak on behalf of someone with a speech disability

Under the customer service standard, universities must permit persons with disabilities to be accompanied and assisted by their support persons while accessing its good or services.

When interacting and communicating with someone who has a support person:

- A person with a disability may not always introduce his or her support person. If you are not sure, it is appropriate to ask, “Is this your interpreter or support person?”
- Although it can feel a little awkward, speak to and look directly at the person with a disability even though the message may be coming from the support person.
- Address the person appropriately: “What courses are you taking this year?” as opposed to “Can you ask him what courses he is taking this year?”
- Remember that support persons, especially interpreters, tend to communicate everything to the person. Avoid engaging in “side” conversations with the interpreter, thinking these won’t be conveyed to the person with the disability.
- Plan for the presence of support persons, e.g., ensure seating arrangements accommodate support persons in locations that will help facilitate communication.
- Where possible, provide written materials both to the person with the disability and the support person.
- During event planning, note the location of washrooms that will accommodate persons with disabilities and their support persons.

What is an assistive device?

An assistive device is any device that is used, designed, made or adapted to assist people in performing a particular task. Assistive devices enable persons with disabilities to do everyday tasks such as moving, communicating, reading or lifting.

Some persons with disabilities use personal assistive devices. Here are a few examples.

- Wheelchairs
- Canes
- Walkers
- Assistive listening devices (FM systems)
- Laptops with screen-reading software or communicating capabilities

- Smart phones (i.e. wireless handheld devices)
- Hearing aids
- Global positioning system (GPS) devices

Here are a few more examples of assistive devices you may come across when communicating and interacting with persons with disabilities on campus.

- Persons with vision loss may use a digital audio player to listen to books, directions, art shows, etc.
- Some persons who are deaf or hard of hearing use teletypewriters (TTY). This machine enables telephone-like communication using text. Calls placed to or from a non-TTY user can be made through the Bell Relay Service.
- Persons who are blind may use a white cane to assist with safety, mobility and independence. The cane is used to check for objects in a person's path, changes in walking surfaces and dangers like steps and curbs.
- Some persons with breathing difficulties carry portable oxygen tanks.
- Persons with learning disabilities or difficulties with memory use personal digital assistants for storing, organizing or retrieving personal, school or employment information.
- Persons with physical, learning or speech disabilities may use laptops to access information, take notes or to communicate.
- Some persons with speech disabilities may use a variety of communication devices, such as voice-output systems or pictures/symbols to communicate.

The customer service standard requires that faculty, staff members and student leaders who act on behalf of the university are familiar with these devices and can either provide assistance or know whom to contact about operating them upon request.

Here are a few examples of assistive devices that may be available at your university.

- Adjustable desks and workstations in classrooms or offices
- Assistive listening devices (e.g., FM systems)
- Lifts in stairwells
- Manual wheelchairs or power scooters
- Teletypewriters (TTY)
- Adaptive computer technology or software

A final requirement of the customer service standard is that faculty, staff members and student leaders know what to do if they encounter a person with a disability having difficulties accessing a service or good on campus or if they observe something that may interfere with accessibility.