

Erickson Lutheran Church
Accessibility Standards for Customer Service
Accessibility for Manitobans Act (AMA) Training

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Getting Started

This section will help you understand disability and barriers to participation, as well as provide tips for how to start working with people with disabilities in your community. Not all disabilities are obvious. Many of our community members may have a disability

Who are People with Disabilities? They are our neighbours, friends, and family members and contribute to our communities. They want to participate in all aspects of our faith community.

When thinking of people with disabilities, some individuals tend to think only of people who use wheelchairs and who have visible physical disabilities. But disabilities can also be invisible; it is not always apparent when someone has a disability

Disability is broadly defined and includes deafness, hearing loss, developmental, learning, and mental health disabilities, and anyone who relies on a service animal, wheelchair, or other assistive device.

In fact:

- Less than 3 percent of people with disabilities use wheelchairs or other mobility devices.
- About 1 in 7 people have a disability. Chances are that every family is touched by disability through their family members, friends, etc.
- By 2035 this number is expected to rise to 1 in 5 people as the population ages. As people grow older, they tend to acquire disabilities, such as hearing loss and vision loss, among others. Places of worship need to accommodate them so they can continue to be vibrant, contributing members of the faith community.
- People with disabilities are not a homogeneous group; they consist of people who may not hear well, see well, or walk easily, or they may have limited coordination or dexterity, or may process information slowly.

Myths about People with Disabilities:

Everyone, regardless of ability, deserves to be treated with the same dignity and respect.

Myths Reality

- People with disabilities are inferior to “normal” people and their lives are very different.

The term “normal” is relative. We all have different abilities, talents, interests, and personalities—you name it! People with disabilities go to school, get married, work, have families, play, do laundry, go shopping, eat out, travel, volunteer, vote, pay taxes, laugh, cry, plan, and dream—just like everyone else.

- We need to feel sorry for people with disabilities.

That's patronizing. People with disabilities don't need pity; they need access to opportunities.

- People with disabilities are brave and courageous.

Adjusting to a disability does not require bravery or courage, it requires one to adapt to a lifestyle.

- You should be careful when you're talking to people with disabilities, because they are easily offended if you use the wrong word.

You just need to be as polite and respectful as you would be when speaking to anyone. If you're not sure what to say or do, it's okay to ask but be sure to listen.

- People with disabilities do not want to participate in activities.

People with disabilities have the same preferences, perceptions, attitudes, habits, and needs as people without disabilities, and they are looking for the same quality of participation and opportunity.

What are Barriers?

Welcoming places of worship are inclusive from the front door to the pulpit.

Barriers are things that make it difficult — or sometimes impossible — for people with disabilities to participate fully in everyday life, including worshipping.

Many people think disabilities are barriers, but that's not the case. Barriers usually develop because the needs of people with disabilities are not considered. It is also important to acknowledge that sometimes long-standing faith traditions may create barriers. Once you understand what accessibility barriers are, you will be able to identify them more easily in your place of worship.

Architectural or Structural Barriers

Architectural or structural barriers may result from a building's design elements that prevent access for people with disabilities. Examples:

- Door knobs that cannot be turned by a person with limited mobility and strength, such as someone with arthritis.
- Stairs to a pulpit, a choir loft, or an upper floor that prevent access by a person using a wheelchair.
- Coat racks that cannot be reached.
- Clutter in the entrance or hallway.

Comments:

Information and Communication Barriers

Information and communication barriers arise when a person with a disability cannot easily receive and/or understand information that is available to others. Examples:

- Small print in prayer books, bulletins, and posters that cannot be read by people with low vision.
- Spoken word in preaching that cannot be heard by a person who is hard of hearing.

Comments:

Attitude Barriers

Attitude is perhaps the most difficult barrier to overcome because it's hard to change the way people think and behave. These barriers may result in people with disabilities being treated differently than people without disabilities. Greet and respond. Examples:

- Assuming someone with a speech impairment has intellectual limitations and speaking to them in a manner that would be used with a child.
 - Speaking to a person's support person rather than the person with the disability.
 - Ignoring or avoiding people with disabilities altogether. Remember, attitude is a major barrier that's within our power to change.
 - Feeling afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing, or being rejected.
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- Not addressing long-standing faith traditions that may create barriers, such as kneeling, prostration, or scripture proclamation.

Comments:

Building Relationships with People with Disabilities

Members of your community may be unsure about the best way to interact with someone who has a disability. As with most human interactions, there is some etiquette to follow. Here are a few tips on interacting and building relationships with people who have various disabilities.

Using the Right Words

- Use person-first language that puts the individual first; for example, say "man who uses a scooter" not "handicapped man" or "wheelchair user."

General Tips

- Ask "How may I help you?" and listen to the response.
- Be honest that you may not know exactly what to say or how to help. Saying that you do not know is the first step to learning something new.
 - Include the person with a disability in resolving the experienced barrier.
 - Demonstrate a warm welcome to potential new members.
 - Avoid stereotypes and do not make assumptions about what type of disability or disabilities the person has. Some disabilities are not visible. It's better to wait until individuals describe their situation to you rather than make your own assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics, and your assumptions may be wrong.

- Be patient. People with certain kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond. A good start is to listen carefully.
- If you cannot understand what the person is saying, politely ask them to repeat themselves.
- Do not touch assistive devices, including wheelchairs, without permission.

Tips for Interacting with People Who Are Deaf, Oral Deaf, Deafened, or Hard of Hearing

- Speak clearly without overemphasizing.
- Use short sentences.
- Reduce background noise and face the listener.
- Get the person's attention before beginning to speak. Try a gentle touch on the shoulder or wave your hand. Use sound amplification technology if it is available
- If necessary, ask if another method of communicating would be easier (for example, using a pen and paper).
- Arrange seating in small groups, preferably in circles or at round tables.
- Ask speakers to provide outlines in large meetings.

Tips for Interacting with People Who Use Wheelchairs

- Assist people who use wheelchairs, who wish to be as independent as possible, only when they request it. Don't touch or move a wheelchair without permission.
- If you are planning an outing, make sure that the destination is barrier-free to avoid problems for people who use wheelchairs or have other needs.
- Speak directly to the person, not to their companion or support person.
- If you need to have a lengthy conversation, consider sitting so that you can make eye contact.

Tips for Interacting with People with Vision Loss

- Don't assume the person cannot see you.
- Identify yourself by name when you are approaching.
- Tell the person when you are leaving the conversation or area.
- Be precise and descriptive when providing directions or instructions.
 - Offer your elbow to guide them as needed. Walk as you usually would.
 - Ask if they would like you to read any printed material out loud to them.
- Offer to describe information.
- Do not touch or address the person's guide dog. Remember that the guide dog is not a pet, it is a working animal. If you are not sure if the animal is a pet or a guide dog, ask the person.

Tips for Interacting with People with Autism

- Routine is important for many people with autism. Surprises are often scary. Allow for predictability and give advance warning of changes. Confusion may manifest as anger, while sudden, loud noises—including unexpected applause—may cause fear.
- Give a normal greeting with brief eye contact, whether a response is forthcoming or possible. Greet the person by name.
- Offer, but don't demand, a handshake.
- Provide aides for worship-related gatherings or events.
- Offer visual support for communications and or instructions.

- Remember that for some people certain sensations that most people take for granted are distasteful or even painful.

Tips for Interacting with People with Alzheimer’s Disease or Other Kinds of Dementia

- Listen closely to what the person is saying.
- Think about the feelings behind the words the person is saying. (Our facial expressions, eye contact, posture, arm, hand and leg positions—all of our body language speaks as loudly as our words).
- Don’t ask the person to remember things that have happened in the past. Talk about what you remember or know happened, and how they were a part of it.
- Treat the person with the same respect and consideration you have for everyone else.
- Be patient.

Tips for Interacting with People with Intellectual Disabilities

- Extend common courtesies, such as shaking hands.
- If you are having difficulty understanding what a person is saying, ask rather than pretend to understand.
- Have a family member or individual within the community welcome and sit with a person and assist during worship, if needed.
- Include children and/or adults with cognitive impairments in as many community programs as possible
- Use plain language and speak in short sentences.
- Be supportive and patient
- Speak directly to the person, not to their companion or support person.

Diversity is an important part of the faith community.

Any questions or comments?
