



Maria Montessori  
Academy *Education For Life*

# **Accessibility Plan**

**Fall 2026**

## **Territory Acknowledgement**

We recognize and respect that the land on which we prosper and learn is on the overlapping traditional territories of the lək'wəŋən speaking peoples (the Songhees and the Esquimalt) and the W̱SÁNEĆ peoples. Generations of trauma have been experienced by the Indigenous groups living in this area and in the entire country of what we now call Canada.

Although we can not change the past, we can learn to reconcile our relationships to grow and move forward together.

We will do this by respecting each other, learning Canada's true history, and being responsible for caring for the environment that surrounds us.

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# Section 1: Introduction

## About Our School Community

Maria Montessori Academy is proud to provide exceptional learning experiences for students. We strive to create a responsive and safe learning and working environment that supports all students and staff and provides equitable opportunities to support our diverse community.

MMA creates learning environments where every student can thrive by prioritizing students' needs, applying evidence-informed practices and building relationships. Our commitment to students goes beyond academics. Students' overall well-being and sense of belonging are equally important.

### Guiding Principles

We recognize each child as a unique individual.

We provide a safe, nurturing, and welcoming community.

We foster the personal and professional development of educational staff

We value the development of the whole child and, therefore:

- We are committed to our students becoming flexible and creative problem solvers
- We cultivate leadership, independent thought, self-confidence and innovative thinking:
- We encourage students to try new things, to take risks, and to be themselves:
- We teach students to become adept at recognizing, correcting, and learning: from their errors in a way that promotes wellness;
- We model respect, consideration for others, and a belief in peaceful conflict resolution as foundations for building community; and
- We recognize that internal satisfaction drives students' curiosity and interest and results in joyous and lifelong learning.

# Maria Montessori's Journey to Accessibility

## Our Commitment:

- **Inclusivity:** We're dedicated to creating spaces that welcome all students, families, staff and community members.
- **Equity:** Our actions are meant to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

## Our Strategy:

- **Equity Statement:** We are drafting a statement that will serve as our pledge to challenge and eliminate any form of inequity or oppression.
- **Accessibility Committee:** This group brings together individuals with various experiences, including those with disabilities, to guide us in removing barriers and setting up best practices for a barrier-free future.

## Our Actions:

- **Improvement:** In 2024, we created our accessibility plan and launched our accessibility committee. We're currently reflecting on our practices to support our vision of accessibility.

## Looking Ahead:

- **Three-Year Plan:** Our Accessibility Committee will examine community feedback through surveys to see where needs are not currently being met. Together, we're building a future where every member of the MMA community can participate fully and meaningfully.

# Definitions

**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 hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person navigating needs or disabilities. Types of barriers in the educational setting:

1. Learning Barrier: any barrier that limits or prevents learning, whether it is through inadequate engagement, representation of the content, or expression of ideas and communication.
2. Architectural and Physical Barrier: A barrier resulting from building design, the area adjacent to the building, the shape of rooms, the size of doorways, the lack of accessibility features, blocked paths of travel, and so on.
3. Attitudinal Barrier: A barrier that arises from the attitudes of staff, students and the school community, including discriminatory behaviours and a lack of disability awareness.
4. 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.
5. Resource Barrier: Barriers resulting from inadequate technology, funding, staff, or tools.
6. Temporal Barrier: Barriers that occur during a specific time, such as busy times of day or during special events.

**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, or cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary or episodic.

# Section 2: Framework Guiding Our Work

## Global Context—United Nations

In recent years, there has been an emphasis on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion within the workplace and within the larger community. In 2006, the United Nations led efforts to adopt the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). In 2010, Canada ratified the CRPD and described it as follows:

“The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human rights treaty aimed at protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. Parties to the Convention of the rights of Persons with Disabilities are required to promote and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights of persons with disabilities including full equality under the law.”

## Canadian Context and Legislation

In 1985, disability was included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In 1986, Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) were included in the new federal Employment Equity Act. The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) came into force in 2019, with the overarching goal of realizing a barrier-free Canada by 2040. This act applies to federally regulated entities. The ACA has seven focus areas, and was developed based on the following guiding principles:

1. All persons must be treated with dignity regardless of their disabilities.
2. All persons must have the same opportunity to make for themselves the lives that they are able and wish to have regardless of their disabilities.
3. All persons must have barrier-free access to full and equal participation in society, regardless of their disabilities.
4. All persons must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities.
5. Laws, policies, programs, services, and structures must consider the disabilities of persons, the different ways that persons interact with their environments and the multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization and discrimination faced by persons.
6. People with disabilities must be involved in the development and design of laws, policies, programs, services, and structures.
7. The development and revision of accessibility standards and the making of regulations must be done to achieve the highest level of accessibility for people with disabilities

## BC Context and Legislation

In June 2021, the provincial government passed the *Accessible B.C. Act*. Its purpose is to establish a legal framework for identifying, removing and preventing barriers to full and equal participation of people with disabilities in British Columbia.

The goal of the Act is to support the identification, prevention and removal of barriers that people with disabilities face in their day-to-day lives.

The Accessible British Columbia Regulation, under the Accessible British Columbia Act, came into force on September 1, 2022. These regulations identify schools as prescribed organizations, and school districts and independent schools are required to have an Accessibility Advisory Group, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool to receive feedback by September 1, 2023. The goal of the act is to improve opportunities for people with disabilities and involve them in identifying, removing, and preventing barriers to their full participation in the life of the province.

## Principles of the Accessible BC Act

The Accessible B.C. Act includes a list of principles that must be considered as organizations develop an accessibility plan. The definitions are adapted from the foundational document [BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#).

**Adaptability:** Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

**Collaboration:** Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

**Diversity:** Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics, including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and lived experience, greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and diversity within the disability community.

**Inclusion:** All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.

**Self-Determination:** Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.

**Universal Design:** The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal

Design as “the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.” An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who interact with the organization.

## Our Commitment

Maria Montessori Academy will create an equitable learning environment where every child can experience a deep sense of belonging and is free to pursue pathways of learning in ways that are authentic to themselves. MMA will achieve this by:

- having students see themselves and their communities in the curriculum and in the staff throughout the School;
- prioritizing student needs by making informed decisions and engaging in open communication with rightsholders and stakeholders; and
- actively fighting systems of oppression through relationship building, ongoing communication and transparency.

### Equity Statement

This Equity Statement serves as our unwavering pledge to challenge and actively eliminate all forms of inequity and oppression within our school and broader community. We are committed to creating an equitable learning environment where every child can experience a deep sense of belonging and is free to pursue pathways of learning in ways that are authentic to themselves.

We will achieve this commitment by:

- Ensuring students see themselves and their communities reflected in the curriculum and in the staff throughout the School.
  - Prioritizing student needs by making informed decisions and engaging in open communication with rightsholders and stakeholders.
  - Actively fighting systems of oppression through relationship building, ongoing communication, and transparency, grounded in humility and accountability.
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## Our Approach

Accessibility refers to the degree of ease with which people with disabilities can use and enjoy something such as a device, service, or place. At Maria Montessori Academy, we are committed to providing an environment that is accessible and practical for all members of our diverse community. We recognize the importance of conscious planning, design, and effort in ensuring that barriers are removed and accessibility is increased.

Our school is committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide equitable treatment to people with disabilities in a way that respects their dignity. To achieve this goal, we have outlined the following commitments:

- Engage with staff, community members and people with disabilities in the development and review of its accessibility plan.
- Ensure that our school board policies and procedures align with the principles of accessibility.
- Improve access to facilities, policies, programs, practices, and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers and community members.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities in our school community.

At Maria Montessori Academy, we believe that all members of our community have the right to be treated with dignity, given an opportunity to participate, and provided with access to learning and community. Our approach is grounded in the core provincial principles of accessibility, including adaptability, collaboration, diversity, inclusion, self-determination and universal design.

In Fall 2024, we began the process of establishing an accessibility committee and identifying barriers to accessibility in our school community. This process will involve:

- Calling for applications for members of the Accessibility Committee
- Developing an Equity Statement
- Assessing the current physical and architectural accessibility of our school.
- Conducting surveys to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities of stakeholders within our school community
- Holding key discussions to identify barriers to accessibility
- Developing a school feedback tool
- Prioritization of actions to be taken
- Establishing a monitoring and evaluation process

Our approach is designed to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility in our school community. By engaging in thoughtful planning, meaningful engagement, training, and direct action, we aim to deliver lasting accessibility improvements for all members of our community.

# Section 3: About Our Committee

## About our Advisory Group

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, organizations must establish an accessibility advisory group to assist with identifying and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. The purpose of the MMA Accessibility Advisory Group is to work collaboratively to assess and improve community accessibility, focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities and/or accessibility needs while encompassing the whole community. The Accessibility Advisory Group also advises the District Accessibility Working Group on strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory, and other barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all aspects of school community life.

As a member of the Associate Member Society of the FISABC (AMS), Selkirk Montessori School participates in the AMS Association-level Accessibility Committee. This committee keeps our school apprised as to the requirements of the Accessibility BC Act and shares resources among the 130 member schools to support the reduction of accessibility barriers within the independent school sector. The AMS Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAAC) fulfills the requirements of the BC Accessibility Act on behalf of its member schools and provides an accessibility perspective and advice to the AMS Board and member schools with respect to achieving goals related to universal accessibility. The mandate of the committee is as follows:

- To inform AMS member schools about the requirements of the BC Accessibility Act.
- To provide advice to member schools about the development of policies and programs to educate and inform on matters affecting students, parents, staff members and guests with disabilities and/or physical or mental challenges and universal accessibility
- To provide advice to the AMS Board about the development of AAAC policies and programs to ensure the needs of people with disabilities are considered.

## Recruitment

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, the selection of accessibility advisory 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 September 2024, a foundational advisory group was selected to reflect a diverse

representation as outlined in the Accessible B.C. Act. As needed, this team will then determine further recruitment needs and appropriate methodologies to extend group membership.

## **Committee Members and Background**

We would like to thank the following advisory group members for their time and commitment to accessibility and inclusion

### Accessibility Committee Membership

<b>Committee Member</b>	<b>Position/Representation</b>
Haley Rymer	Vice Principal
Caroling Blagborne	Facilities Manager
Breanna Bland	Senior School Teacher
Sandra Haywood	Elementary Teacher

# Section 4: Consultation Conducted

## Consultations Plan

### 2023-2026

Methodology	Description	Schedule	Status
Accessibility Plan	An accessibility plan will be created.	September 2024	Completed
<a href="#">Accessibility Committee Call-Out</a>	A call-out for accessibility committee members will be sent to staff and community members.	September 2024	Completed
Audit of policies and practices	Current policies and practices that promote accessibility and inclusion will be reviewed	December 2024	Completed
<a href="#">Survey to Staff</a>	An accessibility and inclusion survey will be developed and distributed to staff.	November 2024	Completed
<a href="#">Survey to Community Members</a>	An accessibility and inclusion survey will be developed and distributed to parents/guardians.	January 2025	Completed
<a href="#">School Physical Accessibility Audit</a>	An Assessment of School Physical Accessibility will be developed. An audit team will be identified, and they will conduct the School Physical Accessibility Audit.	March 2025	Completed
<a href="#">Accessibility Feedback Tool</a>	A feedback tool will be developed and posted to the school website. Information about the tool will be shared with school stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, outside professionals and parents/guardians).	October 2024	Completed

Accessibility Committee Review	The Accessible Committee will review the input and feedback from the survey, assessment, and feedback tool. The Committee will collaborate to suggest priority areas to target in the Accessibility Plan. This will be shared with administrators and the Board, who will give the final approval of priority areas for the plan.	April 2025	Completed
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## 2026-2029

Methodology	Description	Schedule	Status
Review and Update Accessibility Plan	The Accessibility Plan will be reviewed and updated in consultation with the Accessibility Committee, persons with disabilities, and the community.	Annually, 2026-2029	Not Yet Started
Accessibility Feedback Tool	Maintain and promote the existing feedback tool to gather continuous community input.	Ongoing	Active
Annual School Accessibility Audit	Conduct a facility audit and review policies and practices to ensure ongoing maintenance of accessible facilities and compliance.	Annually (Fall)	Not Yet Started
<a href="#">MMA Accessibility Training Plan</a>	Implement a strategic framework for staff accessibility training.	Ongoing	Started June 2026

# Section 5 - Feedback Mechanisms

## Feedback Mechanisms Development

Maria Montessori Academy developed an online feedback tool that included a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, staff and members of the school community could complete. The tool was developed for the main page of the school website, and an information announcement about the tool was written to inform students, staff and parents/guardians. Respondents were able to remain anonymous, or provide their name and contact information if they desired follow-up from the accessibility committee and/or administration.

The following are the contents of the online Accessibility Feedback Tool.

### Report an Accessibility Barrier or Support

At Maria Montessori Academy, we want to learn about specific barriers that people face when they are trying to:

- Access a school program, building or school information
- Receive a service or support

The MMA Accessibility Committee will review your responses to the questions below for their consideration. This information can be submitted anonymously, or you can provide your contact details at the bottom of this form if you wish to be contacted.

1. Please provide the date the barrier or support was experienced.
2. Please select the location where the barrier or support was experienced.
3. What were you or someone you know trying to access?
4. Accessibility barrier or support details (be as specific as possible).
5. Do you have any recommendations for what would make it better?
6. Attach files if you wish to provide additional information (e.g., video, voice recording, photos).
7. Do you wish to be contacted about your responses?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
8. If yes, please provide your name and email or phone number. Responses will be checked quarterly.

Thank you for providing your valuable feedback!

# Section 6: Accessibility

## Accomplishments and Barriers

### Key Discussion Themes

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform Maria Montessori Academy programs, policies, practices, and services to reduce and minimize barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. We strive to create an accessible environment and ensure continuous improvement.

There are a number of initiatives at Maria Montessori Academy to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. We hope to identify areas of strength and growth in the following areas, following feedback and consultation from our staff and community members

Area of Focus	Areas of Strength	Areas of Growth
Learning	<p>Students with diverse needs and disabilities are included in regular classes.</p> <p>Teachers regularly use some key universal supports, including access to audiobooks, computers with voice-to-text technology, use of visual schedules in all classes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Expand professional development on accessible technology.</i></li> <li>- <i>Ensure our classrooms support students with diverse physical and sensory needs.</i></li> </ul>
Equity	<p>Shared information on the accessibility act with school staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Increase awareness and training to ensure consistent application of accessibility practices across all programs.</i></li> </ul>
School Policies and Practices	<p>We are pursuing professional development opportunities that support accessibility awareness, obligations, and inclusive environments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Develop and implement ongoing accessibility training plans for staff and new hires.</i></li> </ul>
Physical and Architectural Environment	<p>The school will conduct a Physical and Architectural Environment Audit.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Upgrade outdoor spaces with accessibility in mind.</i></li> <li>- <i>Improve navigation and accessibility of school website.</i></li> </ul>

# Section 7 - Our Three-Year Plan

## Overview:

This Accessibility Plan will outline the measures Maria Montessori Academy will take to remove and prevent barriers and to promote inclusion for individuals with disabilities in our school community. The plan will be based on the Accessibility Principles of Adaptability, Collaboration, Diversity, Inclusion, Self-Determination, and Universal Design, as set out in the Accessible B.C. Act.

## Accessibility Priorities: 2026-2029

### Priority #1: Learning and Staff Capacity

Objectives	Actions	Timeline	Status
Develop a formalized, comprehensive accessibility training plan for all staff.	Assess staff needs and develop or source training modules focused on inclusive practices, including Universal Design for Learning (UDL).	Fall 2026 - Spring 2027	Not Yet Started
Integrate accessibility and inclusion training into all new staff induction and annual professional development cycles.	Establish clear priorities for professional development and allocate time and resources for ongoing training.	Ongoing, Annually 2026-2029	Not Yet Started
Equip teachers with resources to effectively use accessible and assistive technology in the classroom.	Provide focused training and support on implementing assistive technology for diverse learning needs.	Annually	Not Yet Started

## Priority #2: Inclusive Communications and Systems

Objectives	Actions	Timeline	Status
Formalize clear and intentional communication pathways for student support across all services.	Document the new inclusive education cohort model and communication channels between teachers, inclusive education, and counselling staff.	Fall 2026	Not Yet Started
Ensure all school communication and resources are accessible and use plain language.	Conduct an annual review of digital and print communications to ensure compliance with web accessibility standards (e.g., website, handbooks).	Annually	Not Yet Started
Increase visibility and promotion of the Accessibility Feedback Tool to all stakeholders.	Promote the tool in newsletters, on the school website, and during key community meetings.	Ongoing	Not Yet Started

## Priority #3: Physical Environment Review and Renewal

Objectives	Actions	Timeline	Status
Implement recommendations from the annual accessibility audits to remove and prevent physical barriers.	Allocate capital improvement funds based on the Annual School Physical Accessibility Audit to address identified hazards and necessary upgrades.	Ongoing, Annually 2026-2029	Not Yet Started
Maintain and expand accessible facilities and sensory-friendly learning spaces.	Conduct a review of the usage and effectiveness of the sensory room and accessible facilities to identify any needs for updates or expansion.	Spring 2027	Not Yet Started

Improve wayfinding and clear signage throughout the campus.	Conduct a campus signage audit and implement a plan to add clear, accessible signage (including high-contrast and tactile/Braille options where feasible).	Spring 2028	Not Yet Started
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## **Section 8: Monitoring and Evaluation**

The Accessibility Planning Committee meets (quarterly) to review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation and plan for increased accessibility throughout the school. The committee will ensure the following steps are taken regarding the Three-Year Accessibility Plan:

1. Prepare an annual status report on the progress of the measures taken to implement the plan.
2. Review and update the Three-Year Accessibility Plan every three years in consultation with persons with disabilities and other relevant community members.

[Annual Status Report June 2026](#)

## **Section 9: How to Give Us Feedback**

In addition to the public availability of the plan, Maria Montessori Academy will continue to post an annual status report on the progress of the Three-Year Accessibility Plan on the school's website. Accessible formats of the plan will be made available upon request. Questions, comments or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to: Haley Rymer:  
[miss.haley@mariamontessoriacademy.net](mailto:miss.haley@mariamontessoriacademy.net)

# Section 10: Appendices

## Appendix A: Glossary

Glossary (these definitions are adapted from the foundational document BC Framework for Accessibility Legislation)

**Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC):** an official group established with people with disabilities to develop an accessibility plan and feedback mechanism.

**Accessibility Plan:** a plan, developed by an AAC, that identifies accessibility challenges and solutions for addressing those challenges.

**Barriers:** Anything that hinders the full and equal participation in society of a person with a disability (a) caused by environments, attitudes, practices, policies, information, communications or technologies, and (b) affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.

**Disability:** an inability to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction of an impairment and a barrier.

**Inclusion:** All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.

**Adaptability:** Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.

**Diversity:** Every person is unique. People with disabilities are individuals with varied backgrounds. Individual characteristics, including race, gender, sexual orientation, religion and lived experience, greatly inform the experiences of individuals. Accessibility plans should acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and diversity within the disability community.

**Collaboration:** Promoting accessible communities is a shared responsibility and everyone has a role to play. Accessibility plans should create opportunities for organizations and communities to work together to promote access and inclusion.

**Self-determination:** Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.

**Universal Design:** The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design defines Universal Design as “the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability or disability.” An accessibility plan should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to interact with the organization.

# Appendix B: Research

## About Disability

### The Disability Continuum

There is no universally accepted meaning for the word "disability". However, the Ontario Human Rights Code provides definitions of disability that form our guiding principles. Definitions of disability can be placed on a continuum. At one end, disability is explained in terms of medical conditions (medical model). At the opposite end, disability is explained in terms of the social and physical contexts in which it occurs (environmental model).

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

Many people with disabilities are troubled by definitions that regard disability as abnormal, preferring instead to portray disability as commonplace, natural, and in fact, inevitable. As people age, they experience gradual declines in visual acuity, auditory sensitivity, range of motion, bodily strength and mental powers. Significant functional limitations affect almost half of people between the ages of 55 and 79, and over 70% of people over 80 (World Health Organization (WHO) report titled "Ageing and health", 2015). Beyond middle age, disability is the norm.

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

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

The environmental model emphasizes that people with disabilities are capable individuals, and it is the barriers in the built and human environments, not their medical conditions, that create disability. Disability occurs when the world is designed only for a certain way of living, without considering the natural variation among human beings. Barriers are created by humans, and modifying how we live, the tools we use, and our understanding of the proper way to do things can eliminate or minimize design problems that cause barriers. Systematic barriers can be eliminated by modifying policies, plans, and processes. Attitudes that cause barriers can be addressed through disability awareness, respect, and positive interactions with people with disabilities.

### 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 you 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 goodbye 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.).

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

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## 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 communicate with them.
- Speak directly to the person, as you normally would, not to the intervener.
- Identify yourself as 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 C: Resources

Global, Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Canada Ratifies UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) ● [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)
- [British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#)
- [Accessible British Columbia Act](#)
- [BC Accessibility Legislation Plan Language Summary](#)

Accessibility Planning Resources for Schools and School Boards

- [BC Accessibility Hub](#)
- [Universal Design](#)
- [Special Education Technology BC \(SETBC\)](#)
- [Accessible Resource Centre-BC](#)
- [Standards Council of Canada](#)
- [B6521-95 Barrier-Free Design](#)
- [A Guide to Creating Accessible Play Spaces \(Rick Hansen Foundation\)](#)
- [Canadian National Institute for the Blind \(CNIB\)](#)
- [Canadian Hard of Hearing Association](#)
- [Canadian Hearing Services](#)
- [Auditory Outreach Provincial Resource Program](#)
- [Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program \(Complex Needs\)](#)
- [Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Association of Canada](#)
- [Brain Injury Canada](#)
- [Spinal Cord Injury Canada](#)
- [Tourette Canada](#)
- [Kelty Mental Health \(BC Children's Hospital\)](#)
- [Gifted Children's Association of BC](#)