



Regent Christian Online Academy

Accessibility Plan

2023 – 2026

Growing Together in Grace and Knowledge



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Section 1: Introduction

About Our School Community

Regent Christian Online Academy (RCOA) is an accredited K-12 Provincial Online Education School that serves approximately 1050 students from across the province of British Columbia.

At RCOA, we are committed to meeting the needs of home learning families by providing onsite, home-based, and virtual opportunities to meet our students' needs. We are intentional about building relationships throughout our communities and strive to make a positive impact on the lives of our students and their families.

Our mission is to grow in grace and knowledge as we shine the light of Jesus in all that we do. We believe that every person we serve is unique with immense potential and we are dedicated to supporting them on their journey to academic and personal successes as an act of worship to God.

Our leadership team includes our Principal and Vice Principals, Program Directors, teaching staff, and support/non-teaching staff (SEA's, EA's etc.).

Territorial Acknowledgement

We respectfully and gratefully acknowledge that we gather on the unceded, traditional, and ancestral territories of BC's Indigenous Peoples and we carry forward their intergenerational stewardship as we live, work, and pray on these lands.

A Message from the Principal

At RCOA, our commitment to providing a nurturing and inclusive learning and working environment is rooted in our Christian values. We believe everyone is a unique creation, deserving of respect, love, and equal opportunities to grow and thrive. With this perspective, we are excited to share with you our plan to foster accessibility, equity, and unity within our community.

We understand the importance of embracing diversity and ensuring that every member of our community, regardless of their abilities, can fully take part and contribute. A key element to supporting our community in this way is the development of our Three-Year Accessibility Plan, a manifestation of our commitment to creating a space where everyone can flourish.

This plan has been carefully crafted in collaboration with our school community and the dedicated efforts of the Accessibility Committee, a team that reflects the beautiful diversity of our community. Their regular meetings reaffirm our dedication to identifying priorities and crafting action plans that align with the principles of the Accessibility Act. This Act emphasizes the removal of barriers and the promotion of equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Accessibility enriches not only the lives of those with disabilities but the entire community. Our commitment to advancing the goals of the Accessibility Committee underscores our dedication to making services, facilities, and opportunities equally accessible to all. Through the actions outlined in this Three-Year Accessibility Plan, we pledge to continually enhance an environment that nurtures the potential of every student, staff member, and member of our wider school family.



Dennise Croswell
Principal

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Regent Christian Online Academy
growing together in grace and knowledge

Definitions

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

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, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, 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 behaviors 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, cognitive limitation, whether permanent, temporary, or episodic.

Section 2: Framework Guiding Our Work

RCOA's Accessibility Plan builds on global, national, provincial, and local community actions to promote and support accessibility. Additionally, we also have our own action plans to promote and support accessibility for our community.

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. The United Nations has been instrumental in leading the importance of disability as a global health issue. 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 the CRPD as follows:

“The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is an international human right 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 – Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Canada-wide, around one in five people had some form of disability in 2017. Nationally, Canadian accessibility legislation started in 1985 where disability was included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and 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 to realize 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 people 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 people 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 take into account 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. PWDs 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 with the objective of achieving the highest level of accessibility for PWDs.

B.C. Context and Legislation - Accessible B.C. Act

The Accessible British Columbia Act, enacted in June 2021, and initially the accessibility planning requirements only applied to provincial government organizations.

The Accessible British Columbia Regulation, under the Accessible British Columbia Act, came into force on September 1, 2022. These regulations identify schools as accessible organizations, and school districts and independent schools will be required to have an Accessibility Committee, an Accessibility Plan, and a tool to receive feedback on accessibility 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 in the Accessible B.C. Act:

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

- 1. Adaptability:** Accessibility plans should reflect that disability and accessibility are evolving concepts that change as services, technology, and attitudes change.
- 2. 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.
- 3. 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 the diversity within the disability community.
- 4. Inclusion:** All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
- 5. Self-Determination:** Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.
- 6. 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 to Accessibility:

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 RCOA, we are committed to providing an accessible and practical environment 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.

RCOA is committed to working collaboratively with the community to treat people with disabilities in a way that respects their dignity and is fair. 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 policies and procedures align with the principles of accessibility.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities to our school services and community.

Our Approach:

At RCOA, we believe that all members of our community have the right to be treated with dignity, given an opportunity to take part, and be 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 June 2023, we began identifying barriers to our school community's accessibility. This process involved:

- Calling for members of the Accessibility Committee
- Conducting surveys and interviews to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities of stakeholders within our school community
- Holding key discussions to name barriers to accessibility

- Developing a RCOA feedback tool
- Prioritizing actions to be taken
- Establishing a monitoring and evaluation process

Our approach is designed to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility in the RCOA 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: The Accessibility Committee

Purpose of the Accessibility Committee

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, organizations must establish an Accessibility Committee to help with identifying and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. The accessibility committee's purpose is to work together to assess and improve community accessibility, focusing on the experiences of individuals with disabilities while encompassing the whole community. The Accessibility Committee also advises the school Administration Team on strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory, and other barriers that prevent people from fully taking part in all aspects of school community life.

Recruitment to the Accessibility Committee

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

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

A callout for members to the Accessibility Committee was conducted in June/July/August 2023 to recruit a diverse representation as outlined above. The Accessibility Committee was formally constituted in August 2023. Our goal is to add further diverse representatives to the committee as volunteers become available. Current members of the Accessibility Coordinating Committee are listed below.

Accessibility Committee Members

Committee Member	Position/Representation
Marilyn Smith	Director of Special Education RCOA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FASD Community Practitioner • Parent of children with accessibility needs
Jolene Van Huizen	Director of Learning Support RCOA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive Education Facilitator • Lead Teacher supporting front line staff • Director of Admissions
Carolyn Patterson	Special Education Admin Assistant and Mentor to Special Education Assistants (SEAs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education Assistant • Representative for front line SEAs and their students
Lori ann Brehaut	Special Education Coordinator and High School Course Teacher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher of students with a wide range of accessibility needs

Section 4: Consultation Conducted

Barrier-identification Methodologies

The Accessibility Committee used the following barrier-identification methods:

Methodology	Description	Status
Audit of policies and practices	A review of current policies and practices that promote accessibility and inclusion was conducted by key staff members.	Sept. 2023 - April 2024
Survey to Staff	An accessibility and inclusion survey were developed and distributed to staff.	Dec. 2023 - Jan. 2024
Survey to Parents/Guardians	An accessibility and inclusion survey were developed and distributed to parents/guardians.	Dec. 2023 - Jan. 2024
Accessibility Feedback Tool	A feedback tool was developed and posted to the school website. Information about the tool was shared with school stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, outside professionals, and parents/guardians).	Sept. 2023
Accessibility Committee	The Accessible Committee reviewed the input and feedback from the survey, assessment, and feedback tool. Priority areas were targeted in the Accessibility Plan.	Jan 2024

Section 5: Accessibility Feedback Tool

RCOA developed an online feedback tool that includes a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, people who work with RCOA and other members of the RCOA community can complete. The tool is posted on our website and an information announcement about the tool was provided to everyone in our community. Feedback can be anonymous, or people can add their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted. We included an option for people to upload a video, voice recording or photo(s).

Section 6: Accessibility Accomplishments and Barriers

Accessibility Accomplishments Identified

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

Learning

1. RCOA embraces Universal Design principles and provides education to our staff to foster awareness of and support for every student's needs.
2. RCOA regularly uses key universal supports and assistive technology options, including access to Google Read and Write, audiobooks, computers/tablets with voice to text technology, grammar/spelling application, use of visual schedules in classes.
3. RCOA makes "accessibility for all" a key principle in planning and delivering all our programming including our onsite and virtual classroom experiences.
4. RCOA is committed to creating and providing curriculum that is designed with every student in mind. There are a variety of options to choose curriculum that meets the needs of unique learners. Flexible PIE and Club teachers work with teams to provide access to necessary adaptations, strategies, and tools/resources in the classroom (i.e., fidgets, flexible seating options, instructional strategies, etc.)
5. RCOA fosters a supportive, inclusive environment for every learner that recognizes unique support needs and provides individualized support that enables students to succeed.

Equity

1. RCOA has shared information on the accessibility act with school staff, students, and parents/guardians through our website.
2. RCOA has an up to date Anti-discrimination Policy, and staff are trained and equipped to deal with discrimination and equity issues that arise.

School Policies and Practices

1. Mental Health and Well-being Supports
 - RCOA recognizes the importance of mental health and the well-being of its students and staff, especially as the world has experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects. Initiatives have taken place to assess and improve the mental health and well-being of students and staff to ensure support and positive outcomes.
 - RCOA offers training to staff to promote student mental health and improve personal mental health and well-being and to reduce stigma associated with mental illness.
 - RCOA has an impressive and engaging video library that addresses important mental health topics. It was developed with support from a professional counselor (Katie Kwon) and is available to our community of staff, students, and parents.
2. Accessibility Awareness Training
 - RCOA continues to provide staff and students with teaching that supports accessibility awareness and inclusiveness.

Accessibility Barriers Identified

RCOA is committed to identifying accessibility barriers. Our Accessibility Committee developed an accessibility survey that was distributed widely to our community over two months in December and January of the 2023-24 school year. The results have been used to identify accessibility barriers within the school and to initially inform our accessibility plan. We plan to develop a comprehensive understanding of these, and other barriers found through various mechanisms that may include an accessibility audit and obtaining advice from accessibility consultants and the accessibility

committee.

Learning Barriers

1. Some community members found that it was difficult to navigate the school website and to find information they hoped to access.
2. Excessive echo, noise transfer in the classroom environment was identified as making hearing difficult for those with hearing impairments
3. The shortage of substitute SEAs to provide support when an SEA is absent was concerning parents of children with one-to-one support needs.
4. Student anxiety was identified by respondents as being increased when classroom schedules are unpredictable or unavailable.
5. Respondents suggested supporting teachers to promote the inclusion of children with special needs in their classrooms by supplying them with resources, tools and strategies.

Physical and Architecture Environment Barriers

1. Some classrooms have noise issues that make it difficult for some students due to auditory sensitivities.
2. Request for classroom adaptations to increase auditory access for all. Examples include: - soft pads on the bottom of chairs to reduce background noise -group work more spread out to reduce background noise -use is subtitles when showing video in the classroom

Resource Barriers

1. Navigating school systems to access resources

Attitudinal Barriers

The following suggestion was brought forward through our survey:

1. Encourage parents to promote inclusion in their homes

Section 7: Our Three-Year Plan (2023-2026)

Overview:

This Accessibility Plan shows RCOA’s priorities from September 2023 to August 2026. The plan is 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:

The Accessibility Committee has identified the following areas as the top priority for improving accessibility in the school community.

Priority #1: Learning

RCOA will enhance the accessibility of access to learning for all individuals, including those with disabilities, through the following actions:

Objectives	Actions	Timeline
Equip teachers to design lessons using UDL principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide professional development for educators on UDL • Provide collaboration time and coaching to increase teacher ability to use UDL lesson planning • Prioritize 3-5 universal supports to implement within our onsite classrooms and within courses being developed • Normalize supports within the classroom and inform teachers and students how they can be helpful for everyone 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Implemented by September 2025</p> <p>Ongoing</p>
Ensure that all communication to staff, students, and parents/guardians is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute guidelines and examples for communication to all stakeholders 	Implemented by October 2023

written in plain language and is available in alternate formats upon request		
Improve the number and type of accessible format resources for students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RCOA will explore further use of accessibility tools in its learning platform and other learning applications, including assistive technology extensions. 	Implemented by December 2024
Increase training in the use of accessible format materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide staff training on the various types of accessible materials available and how to use them 	Implemented by February 2025
<p>Provide classroom teachers with a unique range of resources to support all students who might benefit.</p> <p>Encourage classroom teachers to make readily available their daily plans and distribute ahead of time to students who benefit from knowing the “shape of the day” in advance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide teachers with access to fidgets, a range of seating options, sensory tools, and equipment, etc. to support learning success, for use in their classrooms • Inform and educate all teaching staff of the importance of providing an accurate daily schedule to students and equip them with tools to simplify this process • Ask teachers to communicate planned and last-minute daily schedule changes to students who are impacted by unexpected changes to the plan 	<p>Implemented by September 2024</p> <p>Ongoing Implementation</p>
Investigate new advertising options for securing substitute SEAs to help ensure student support when regular SEAs are unavailable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach HR for ideas and direction as to how to secure new staff for the purpose of SEA TTOC’s • Build up our bank of available SEA substitutes. 	Ongoing

Priority #2: Physical and Architectural

RCOA will improve the accessibility of the physical and architectural environment for all individuals, including those with disabilities through the following actions:

Objectives	Actions	Timeline
Develop a standard for both vision and hearing impairment related accessibility issues (including sound and light sensitivities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide sound fields in identified classrooms to support students with hearing impairments and attention issues. 	Done and ongoing as needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess noise issues and figure out solutions in classrooms and other areas of the school Explore use of sound reduction equipment such as foot protectors for tables and chairs and sound tiles for desks 	Implementation of noise reduction strategies/ equipment specific to classrooms where hearing impaired students are learning by April 2024
Provide alternative learning spaces for students with diverse needs and disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine the current needs of students who may require alternate learning spaces from time to time 	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct an audit of current alternate learning spaces that can meet the identified needs 	Implementation by August 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a plan and budget for the provision of additional alternative learning spaces or accommodations to address the needs identified 	Implementation by September 2024
Develop effective classroom processes for modulating noise levels in the classrooms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach and reinforce expected behaviors, remind students about noise levels 	

Priority #3: School Policy and Practice

RCOA will review and revise policies and practices to ensure they align with the principles

of accessibility and address any identified gaps in staff training or knowledge on accessibility issues.

Objectives	Actions	Timeline
Summarize and celebrate current accessibility practices within the school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an audit of school accessibility practices and summarize the results 	Implementation by September 2025
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide information to staff about current accessibility practices within the school 	Ongoing
Identify areas needed for further staff training on accessibility issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop priorities for staff accessibility training 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an implementation plan to provide the accessibility training needed for current staff and new staff onboarding 	
Develop Emergency Plans for each student with mobility or sensory needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify students and staff who may need help during emergencies • Develop evacuation procedures for students/staff with mobility and sensory considerations • Inform and prepare students with sensory challenges in advance of emergency drills so they can anticipate and be ready for the drills • Provide staff training and practice the plans in emergency drills 	Implementation by December 2025

Priority #4: Resources

RCOA will increase awareness and training on assistive technology for students with disabilities.

Objectives	Actions	Timeline
Increase awareness of specific assistive technology needs for students with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct class reviews of technology needs for students 	Implementation September 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide training for staff on the various technology needs of students 	In place and ongoing
Provide access and training for the various technology tools needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development for staff. • Technology implementation plan for training and supporting students in technology use 	Ongoing Ongoing -Individualized implementation to be completed in the fall of 2024
Provide access to and training for speech to text and text to speech applications and technology	Professional development/training for staff Individualized planning and implementation of training for students in technology use	-Implementation by December 2024

Section 8: Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Planning Committee will review implementation progress and evaluate the plan's effectiveness for increased accessibility throughout the school community.

The following steps are taken regarding this 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.

Section 9: How to Give us Feedback

In addition to making RCOA's accessibility plan available to the public for viewing, we will post an annual report to our website.

Questions, comments, or feedback regarding RCOA's Accessibility Plan may be directed to our Accessibility Committee: accessforall@rcoa.ca

Section 10: Appendices

Appendix A: About Disability

The Disability Continuum

Although 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 for 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 changing 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 changing 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 colors, 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 must pay attention. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- If you are giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you are approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. Do not just assume the individual cannot see you.
- When entering a room, show the individual to a chair, or guide them to a comfortable location.
- Identify landmarks or other details to orient the person to the environment around them.
- Ensure you say good-bye prior to leaving the individual.
- Be patient. Things may take a little longer.

Hard of Hearing and Deafness

People who have hearing loss may be deaf or hard of hearing. Like other disabilities, hearing loss has a wide variety of degrees. People who are hard of hearing may require assistive devices when communicating. While some people may use sign language, notes or hearing aids when communicating, others may also use email, pagers, TTY telephone service or Bell Canada Relay Service.

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

- Always ask how you can help. Do not 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-lit 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 understood.
- Service animals are working and must pay attention. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- Any personal (e.g., financial) matters should be discussed in a private room to avoid other people overhearing
- Be patient. Communication for people who are deaf is different because their first language may not be English. It may be American Sign Language (ASL).
- If the person uses a hearing aid, try to speak in an area with few competing sounds.

Physical Disabilities

There are many types and degrees of physical disabilities and not all require a wheelchair. For example, people who have arthritis, heart or lung conditions, or amputations may also have difficulty moving, standing, or sitting. It may be difficult to identify a person with a physical disability.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with physical disabilities:

- Speak normally and directly to the person rather than someone who is with them.
- People with physical disabilities often have their own ways of doing things. Ask before you help.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like “handicapped.”
- Be patient and be sure you understand their needs.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching any assistive devices, including wheelchairs.
- Provide the person with information about accessible features of the immediate environment (automatic doors, accessible washrooms, etc.).

Intellectual Disabilities

People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may have difficulty doing many things most of us take for granted. These disabilities can mildly or profoundly limit one's ability to learn. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with intellectual disabilities:

- As much as possible, treat the person with an intellectual disability like anyone else. They may understand more than you think, and they will appreciate you treating them with respect.
- Don't assume what a person can or cannot do.
- Avoid referring to the disability or using phrases like "handicapped."
- Use simple words and short sentences.
- Make sure the person understands what you have said.
- If you cannot understand what is 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 many different communications difficulties for people. They can be subtle, as in having difficulty reading, or more pronounced, but they can interfere with the person's ability to receive, express or process information. You may not be able to know that someone has one of these disabilities unless you are told, or you notice the way people act, ask questions or body language.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with learning disabilities or disabilities:

- Patience and a willingness to find a way to communicate are your best tools.
- Recognize that some people with communication difficulties use augmentative communication systems such as Signed English and Picture Exchange System.
- When you know that someone with a learning disability needs help, ask how you can best help.
- Speak normally and clearly, and directly to the person
- Take some time — people with some kinds of disabilities may take a little longer to understand and respond.
- Try to find ways to provide information in a way that works best for them. For example, have a paper and pen handy.
- If you are 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 everyone else. You will not know that the person has a mental health disability unless you are informed of it. If someone is having difficulty controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help. 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 people with a mental health disability and their needs.
- If someone appears to be in a crisis, ask him or her to tell you the best way to

help.

- Take the person with a mental health disability seriously, and work with them to meet their needs.

Speech and Language Disabilities

Some people have communication challenges. It could be the result of cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or another condition that makes it difficult to pronounce words, causes slurring or stuttering, or not being able to express oneself or understand written or spoken language. Some people who have severe difficulties may use communication boards, sign language or other assistive devices.

Here are some suggestions to help you interact with people with speech and language disabilities:

- Just because a person has one disability does not mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you do not 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 to the intervener when you approach the person who is deaf-blind.
- Don’t touch service animals – they are working and have to pay attention at all times.
- Unless it is an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

Appendix B: Suggested References/Resources

Global, Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation

[United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

[Canada Ratifies the 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](#)

[Developing Your First Accessibility Plan: A Guide for BC Prescribed Organizations](#)

[Creating an Accessibility Committee](#)

[Universal Design](#)

[Special Education Technology BC \(SET BC\)](#)

[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 \(CNIB\)](#)

[Provincial Resource Centre for the Visually Impaired \(PRCVI\)](#)

[Canadian Hard of Hearing Association](#)

[Canadian Hearing Services](#)

[Provincial Outreach Program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing \(POPDHH\)](#)

[Auditory Outreach Provincial Resource Program](#)

[Provincial Outreach Program for Students with Deafblindness](#)

[Provincial Inclusion Outreach Program](#) (Complex Needs)

[Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders](#)

[Provincial Outreach Program for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder](#)

[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](#)

[Specialist Association of Gifted Educators in BC](#)