



Fact Sheet: Working with Persons with Physical Disabilities

Humber College is increasing accessibility for persons with disabilities. Over 15.5% of people in Ontario have a disability. That means approximately 1 in every 7 Ontarians has a disability and as the population ages that number will continue to grow. This resource is intended to provide faculty and staff with suggestions to work more effectively with persons with physical disabilities.

Physical disabilities affect a person's physical functioning, mobility, dexterity or stamina. A person with a physical disability may not be able to fully use a certain part of their body such as their legs, eyes, ears, or hands. They may use special equipment to assist in helping these parts work better or complete task in a different. Some people are born with a physical disability while others may acquire a disability later in life. As with many disabilities, there are many types and degrees of physical disabilities. A physical disability can be:

Permanent

Limb amputation
Arthritis

Temporary

Broken limb
Hand injuries

Visible

The use of a cane
The use of a scooter

Invisible

Chronic fatigue
Fibromyalgia

People who have physical disabilities may experience difficulties moving and standing or sitting for extended periods of time. They may walk unassisted but find stairs or other barriers such as opening doors problematic. You may not be aware that a person has a physical disability unless they share that information with you. The table below provides suggestions for interacting with persons with physical disabilities to ensure they have equal access to goods and services at Humber College.

Suggestions for Interacting with People with Physical Disabilities:

- ✓ Always ask, "How can I help you?" People with physical disabilities often have their own way of doing things. Ask before you provide assistance.
- ✓ If speaking to someone in a wheelchair or scooter for an extended period of time sit so that you are eye level with them, if possible.
- ✓ Provide a place for people with physical disabilities to sit while they are waiting for service.
- ✓ Speak directly to the person as you normally would, not to their support person or companion.
- ✓ Assistive devices, including wheelchairs should not be touched without permission. They are considered an extension of the person and their personal space.
- ✓ Inform the person about accessible features in the surrounding area, for example automatic doors, accessible washrooms, and elevators.
- ✓ Keep passageways and customer circulation routes clear of obstacles.
- ✓ Be patient. People with physical disabilities will tell you how to best assist them.
- ✓ Allow scheduled appointments, particularly if wait lines or queue lines are present.

Sources:

1. Tips of Serving Customers with Disabilities. Retrieved from <https://ddsb.ca/AboutUs/Accessibility/Documents/Accessibility%20Tips.pdf>
PDF is developed by Accessible Ontario Customer Service <https://www.osesc-cseo.org>
2. Understanding Disabilities. Ministry of Social and Community Services.
http://www.mcscs.gov.on.ca/en/mcscs/programs/accessibility/understanding_accessibility/physical_disabilities.aspx