

AODA Tipsheet #6

Communicating with a member with a learning disability

This series provides tips for Ontario housing co-ops on communicating with members with disabilities. Using these tips will help your co-op adhere to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA).

Depending upon the type of learning disability, a member may have difficulty in one or more of the following areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, reading skills, reading comprehension, math calculations, organization, or problem solving.

GENERAL TIPS

If you know that a member needs assistance, politely ask how you best help.

Be flexible with your approach. There are a variety of different ways to complete a task.

Some tasks may take longer to perform or complete for members with a learning disability. Have realistic expectations with respect

When a new or altered routine is necessary, notify the individual, provide an explanation of what can be anticipated and reduce confusion.

What appears to be a simple way to carry out a task for you may not be the most logical way for a person with a learning disability. Conversely, what might appear to be a complicated way of doing something may be the easiest way for the person with a learning disability. The important point is to find a strategy that works best

COMMUNICATION TIPS

Communication is a two-way street: be patient and give the member the opportunity to explain what information or assistance they require. Keep in mind that people with some kinds of learning disabilities may need more time to express themselves.

Speak naturally, clearly and directly to your member. Use everyday language when speaking to a person with an auditory learning disability. Use short and simple sentences. Avoid using complex language. Remember simplifying the surprises and language you use does not mean treating adults like children. Use an age-appropriate tone of voice and language.

Don't assume that a person with a learning disability has understood, or conversely, failed to understand you. Politely ask whether or not you provided sufficient information. Clarify what you have said by summarizing the information. Be brief and to the point.

Be aware that as situations change, so may the person's ability to process information and communicate. Just because a person's learning disability affects them in a particular way in one setting, does not mean that it will affect them the same way in another setting.

People with learning disabilities may use alternative technology for writing, text-to-speech systems, tape recorders and mini pocket recorders, or assistive software programs. Ask the person with the learning disability whether they use assistive technologies and the best way to incorporate them into your communication.

When giving instructions, breaking large tasks into small and clearly defined sequential steps can be helpful to some individuals with a learning disability.

Consider offering information in different formats. A written notice followed up by a phone call, an audio version of a lease agreement in addition to a print version, and using drawings, diagrams, photographs or symbols to support written information are a few examples that may help ensure members with certain types of learning disabilities receive and understand the information.