

AODA Tipsheet #7

Communicating with a member with a developmental or intellectual 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).

GENERAL TIPS

Don't make assumptions about what a person can or cannot do. Remember, the person is an adult and, unless there is a legally-appointed decision-maker, can make his/her own decisions.

Some people with a developmental disability may bring a support person to a meeting. The person themselves should always feel that they are the primary focus of the communication.

Be flexible, and supportive. Take time to listen to, and understand the individual and make sure the individual understands you.

It can be difficult for some people who have a developmental disability to make quick decisions. Be patient and allow the person to take their time.

Allow the time required for the person to respond to questions or a statement. It may appear as though the person has not understood the question or statement. Often it just takes time to process the incoming information, up to 45 seconds in

Adjust the length of conversations to maximize their ability to remain attentive and decrease stress level.

Give instructions and have discussions in a quiet, informal, distraction-free environment.

Don't use baby talk or talk down to people who have developmental disabilities. Gauge the pace, complexity, and vocabulary of your speech according to theirs.

Keep language simple, specific and concrete. Concrete language refers to making the meaning of a sentence very plain - the words simply mean what they say. Much of our language involves sub meanings such as sarcasm, irony or reading between the lines. Some people with developmental disabilities have trouble with anything other than a literal meaning of the words spoken.

Describe tasks or requests clearly, concisely and simply. Break down instructions into clearly defined small, sequential steps, keeping verbal descriptions short and direct. Keep the number of steps to a minimum to avoid confusion.

Use concrete terms and avoid abstract ideas. Where possible give visual cues some cases.

Be prepared to provide information in different ways (orally, in writing, or using multiple formats).