



What you should expect from a business or organization

For people who have speech or language disabilities

In Canada, there are many laws that protect your right to use businesses and organizations in the same way as people who do not have disabilities. Based on these laws, you can expect people to do certain things so that you can effectively communicate and use their goods and services.

Here are some practical examples of how people, who have speech or language disabilities, can apply the principles that are behind these laws.

Please customize this document for your own use. You may want someone to give you pictures or symbols for these items or you may want to program them into your communication device.

When you use a business or organization, you have the right to expect to:

- Be treated in a respectful manner.

People should speak directly to you in a normal tone and volume. They should take your opinions, decisions and feelings seriously. They should not underestimate your abilities.

- Be spoken to in ways that you can understand.

People should use everyday language when speaking with you. They should not assume that you cannot understand what they are saying. You may bring someone with you to give instructions about what others can do to make it easier for you to understand.

- Use the communication method(s) that you think is most effective.

You may choose what communication methods work best for you. Nobody can tell you what you can or can't use to communicate. You can choose to use your speech, writing, gestures, sign language, a communication display, or a device. You can also have help from a sign language interpreter, a translator for your first language, a communication assistant, or someone who knows you well. Most people use a combination of methods to communicate.

- Have someone follow your communication instructions.

People should follow your instructions about how to communicate with you. You can give instructions by using your device, or showing a card with written instructions or having someone explain what you want. Here are some examples of useful instructions: wait for me to finish my message; read what I point to on my display; tell me if you don't understand my message.

- Get the time you need to communicate.

People need to be patient and not rush you when you are communicating. You can ask for extra time when you are making an appointment because it takes longer for you to communicate.

- Be understood.

People should tell you if they don't understand your message. They should try to reduce noise and distractions, and give you time to repeat or communicate your message in other ways. In some situations, you may want someone to assist you with communication.

- Be given opportunities to share your ideas and opinions, as well as answering someone's questions.

You have the right to communicate any message you choose. Nobody can tell you that you cannot communicate what you want to say.

- Communicate over the telephone using your most effective method(s) or arrange other ways to connect.

You can chose how you communicate over the telephone. You may use your speech, or a device, a communication assistant, someone to communicate on your behalf, relay services, or a TTY. You can also request an alternative to the telephone, such as using email, fax, text, or arranging a face-to-face meeting.

- Be given accommodations that you may need to communicate at meetings.

You can request accommodations, such as having an agenda ahead of time, or asking for a communication assistant. You may want to negotiate with the chair of the meeting how you will signal when you have something to say, and what the group should do when you are preparing your messages. This applies to face-to-face meetings as well as to conference and video calls.

- Be given text, print and electronic information in ways you can handle, read and understand.

An organization's website must be accessible so that you can efficiently find the information you want. You can ask to have documents in alternate formats (e.g. electronic versions, large print). You may also ask for someone to assist you to read and understand a document.

- Be given accessible forms, and any assistance you may need to take notes and sign documents.

You can ask for documents (forms, surveys, ballots) in accessible formats that you can use independently. You can ask for assistance to complete writing tasks, take notes and sign documents.

Within Educational Settings:

- Be given communication assistance, tools and accommodations to access all educational activities, texts and curricula.

Educational institutions must provide ways, opportunities and support so that you can effectively communicate and access all activities, texts and curricula. If your disability affects your ability to learn, it means that you have the right to receive instruction from personnel (teachers, educational assistants and therapists) who are qualified to work with students who have speech or language disabilities.

Within Essential Services (e.g. health, law enforcement, legal services and other essential services):

- Get communication assistance so that you can communicate effectively.

If you don't have someone who can assist you communicating in these situations, you can expect the organization to find and pay for a communication assistant. The person assisting you should help you communicate with others and give you the words, pictures or symbols you need to communicate. You can refuse assistance from someone who does not have the skills to assist you or who makes you uncomfortable.

Within Emergency Services:

- Be able to communicate with emergency personnel and be given essential words, pictures or symbols that you can use in an emergency situation.

If you are in a crisis situation, emergency response personnel should know how to communicate with you (with or without your usual communication methods). For example, they should ask you how you communicate “yes” and “no”. They should read your instructions on a display or have pictures of essential words that you can use in an emergency situation.