



St. Thomas More  
Collegiate

LEARN. LEAD. SERVE.

**Accessibility Plan**  
September 2023

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## Section 1: Introduction

### Land Acknowledgement

As part of St. Thomas More Collegiate's Truth and Reconciliation journey we acknowledge that we are settlers on these ancestral and unceded homelands of the hən̓q̓'əmin'əm̓ and Skwxwú7mesh speaking peoples and that we are privileged to learn, lead, and serve on these lands. We extend a genuine appreciation for this opportunity and will strive to honour the land, ancestors, and current peoples of this territory as part of our and Canada's journey towards healing and reconciliation.

### About Our School Community

St. Thomas More Collegiate is a progressive co-ed Blessed Edmund Rice Christian Brother Catholic Independent high school in Burnaby, B.C. We are an affiliate member of the Catholic Independent Schools Vancouver Archdiocese "CISVA". STMC serves approximately 695 students from grade 8 to 12.

Our school's faculty consists of about eighty employees. That includes the leadership team which is composed of our President Stephen Garland, Principal Joe Adams, and two Vice Principals. We have forty seven teaching staff and eleven educational assistants. We also have eighteen support staff that range from personal counsellors to our business office.

At St. Thomas More Collegiate, we are committed to providing a learning and working environment that supports all students and staff and provides equitable opportunities to support our diverse community. A key element to supporting our community is the development of a Three-Year Accessibility Plan. This plan identifies system needs, priorities, and action plans, and will draw on feedback from our local school community and the work of the CISVA Accessibility Committee to enhance equity of access to programming and our facilities.

We recognize the importance of accessibility not only for those with disabilities but also for the benefit of the entire community. We are committed to advancing the efforts of the Accessibility Committee to improve equity and ease of access to services, as well as access to our facilities. Through the actions in this Accessibility Plan, we commit to continuous improvements in developing an environment that supports all students, staff, and the larger school community.

## Section 2: Framework Guiding Our Work

The St. Thomas More Collegiate accessibility plan builds on global, national, provincial and school specific actions to promote and support accessibility.

### **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 CPRD 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 persons 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 persons 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 was 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 includes a list of 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 St. Thomas More Collegiate, we are committed to providing an environment that is accessible and practical 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.

Our school is committed to working collaboratively with the community to provide equitable treatment to people with disabilities in a way that respects their dignity. 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.
- Improve access to facilities, policies, programs, practices, and services for students, staff, parents/guardians, volunteers, and community members.
- Continually improve accessibility for people with disabilities in our school community.

## **Our Approach:**

At St. Thomas More Collegiate, we believe that all members of our community have the right to be treated with dignity, given an opportunity to participate, and 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, St. Thomas More Collegiate, in conjunction with the CISVA, began the process of establishing an accessibility committee and identifying barriers to accessibility in our community this process included:

- Calling for applications for members for the CISVA Accessibility Committee.
- Assessing the current physical and architectural accessibility of our school.
- Initializing the opportunity for stakeholders within the school community to provide

feedback to understand the issues, challenges, and priorities within our school community. This process continues.

- Holding initial discussions to identify barriers to accessibility.
- Developing a school feedback tool.
- Prioritization of actions to be taken .
- Developing a monitoring and evaluation process.

Our approach is designed to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility in our school 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**

As an affiliate school, St. Thomas More Collegiate is part of the CISVA Accessibility Committee. Under the Accessible B.C. Act, organizations must establish an Accessibility Committee to assist with identifying and preventing barriers to individuals in or interacting with the organization. The purpose of the accessibility committee is to work collaboratively 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 CISVA Superintendent's Office and CISVA school and affiliate school administrators on strategies to reduce social, physical, sensory and other barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all aspects of school community life.

### **Recruitment to the Accessibility Committee**

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, the selection 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 persons in B.C.

A callout for applications to the Accessibility Committee was conducted in June 2023 to recruit representatives as outlined above. The Accessibility Committee was formally constituted in October 2023. Current members of the CISVA Accessibility Committee are listed below.

## Accessibility Committee Membership

Committee Member	Position/Representation
Nick Schneider	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Executive Director of Finance and Admin (CISVA)</li><li>• Parent of child with disability</li></ul>
Anne Yam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Principal of St. Francis Xavier Elementary School</li><li>• Person with a disability</li></ul>
Jollette Moeliker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teacher St. Mary's Elementary School Chilliwack</li><li>• Person with disability</li></ul>
Alexis Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indigenous consultant to CISVA</li></ul>

## Section 4: Consultation Conducted

### Barrier-identification Methodologies

The CISVA Accessibility Committee used or will use the following barrier-identification methods:

<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Status</b>
Survey to Staff	An accessibility survey was developed and made available to staff.	Ongoing
Survey to Parents/Guardians	An accessibility survey was developed and made available to students, parents and/or guardians.	Ongoing
School Physical Accessibility Audit	Each school completed the Physical Accessibility Audit the information was then consolidated	September 2023
Accessibility Committee	The Accessible Committee reviewed Physical Accessibility Audit The Committee collaborated to suggest priority areas to target in the Accessibility Plan. This was shared with school administrators.	December 2023

## Section 5: Accessibility Feedback Tool

St. Thomas More Collegiate, in conjunction with the CISVA, developed a feedback form that includes a series of questions about accessibility experiences that students, staff and members of the school community can complete. The form has been posted to the main page of the school website and an information announcement about the form has been/will be provided to students, staff, and parents/guardians.

## Section 6: Accessibility Accomplishments and Barriers

### **Accessibility Accomplishments Identified**

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform school 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.

There are several initiatives at our school to identify, remove and prevent barriers for people with disabilities. The following is a summary of some of the achievements.

### **Learning Environment Achievements**

1. Several key universal supports are currently implemented in classrooms.
  - Specialized Educational Consultants contracted to support those with visual and auditory challenges.
  - One to One Chromebook plan for all students.
  - Expansion of our Learning Resource Centre to accommodate more students who need support with or without formal designation.
  - Development of a life skills program for those requiring this level of support.
  - Creation of a quiet test room that is open to all students upon request.
  - Technology to assist students with diverse abilities within the classroom.
2. The school continues its efforts toward inclusion and accessibility to learning from the feedback it receives from stakeholders.

## **Physical and Architectural Environment**

1. STMC conducted a Physical and Architectural Environment Audit to identify areas of physical accessibility and areas for improvement in the physical and architectural environment of the school. Accomplishments included:
  - Wheelchair accessibility improved over the years with integration of ramps during new construction.
  - Elevator to the second floor.
  - Designated parking stalls.
  - Accessible washroom for those requiring a larger space and/or non gendered washroom access or changing space.
  - Accessible handles in all staff and accessible washrooms.
  - Accessible handles on all interior and exterior doors.
  - Edges of steps and handrails marked in high contrast colours for those with visual challenges.
  - Uneven pavement spots marked with high contrast colours.
  - Crutches on hand for those needing support.
  - Adjustable lighting installation to accommodate light sensitivity as well as those seeking low light due to concussions.
  - Use of calm colour choice for LRC area of school.

## **School Policy and Practice**

1. Adaptations for Students:
  - The school continues to assess student accommodation requirements on a case-by-case basis and uses all relevant information to respond to each scenario.
  - The school has established practices and procedures by which adaptations are offered throughout the school. Universal Design for Learning has been promoted and stressed to teachers regarding supports for all students. For students with specific needs and IEPs, adaptations and supports are created in consultation with parents/guardians, students, staff, para-education consultants on a case by case basis. STMC strives to implement any and all suggestions

from para-educational consultants to help support students. Ex.

FM/Microphone systems for students with hearing challenges, text to speech programs to accommodate students who need accommodations.

- Adaptations include: promotion of differentiated and multiple modality instruction and assessment in all subject areas over the span of grade 8 to 12; development and implementation of student learning plans and IEPs to support inclusive education; a wide range of extra curricular and club activities offerings that are open to all students.

## 2. Mental Health and Well-being Supports

- The school recognizes the importance of the mental health and well-being of its students and staff. Initiatives have taken place to assess and improve the mental health and well-being of students and staff to ensure support and positive outcomes. At STMC three different personal counselors are available to the student body and are available during the school day. These counselors do frequent check-ins with students as well as provide presentations to the student and parent community.
- Training programs are offered to staff to promote student mental health and improve personal mental health and well-being and reduce stigma associated with mental illness.

## 3. Universal Design for Learning Training

- Ongoing training continues to be provided to staff and students that supports accessibility to learning. Professional development with prominent professionals on inclusion and UDL have occurred and are planned in the future. Ex. Shelly Moore ProD Nov 2024, Shelly Moore ProD sessions for 2025-26 school year.

## 4. Student Services Department

- Frequent “At Risk” meetings with staff to identify those needing support.
- Full implementation of a “All Hands on Deck” Administrative Group designed to support those needing more than just academic support in order to find success at school.
- Director of Student Services, Academic Counselling, Personal Counselling,

LRC Dept, and Administration monitor and meet to monitor at-risk students who need multidisciplinary support. Each department maintains a caseload of students to monitor, track, and ensure these students find academic, social, emotional, and learning support if needed.

- Ongoing normalizing of how support from LRC or UDL methods is not something to be ashamed of. Director of Student Services, Personal Counselling, and Administration provide information and opportunities for speakers surrounding supports to normalize this level of support.

## 5. Guiding Principles

- Being a Edmund Rice Christian Brother school, STMC keeps at front of mind seven essential elements when creating any policy and enacting practice. The two crucial tenants that guide our practice from those seven elements are “Stand in solidarity with those marginalized by poverty and injustice” and “Celebrate the value and dignity of each person and nurture the development of the whole person”. When crafting policy these two guiding principles are always considered to ensure we are considering all members of our community.

## **Accessibility Barriers Identified**

### **Physical and Architecture Environment Barriers**

1. No automatic entry doors to the school. A push button access system needs to be installed for those with mobility challenges.
2. No elevator access to the third floor. While no students access the third floor, STMC has two Christian Brothers in residence. There is a stair lift for those with mobility challenges, however this is not located near the elevator causing extra distance to be traveled to access the third floor if someone has mobility challenges. If future construction occurs perhaps a small elevator installation to the third floor should be considered.
3. The elevator is not centrally located for students with mobility challenges. This causes excess distance to be traveled potentially putting more strain on those on crutches or with

mobility challenges. In a new build or major renovation, perhaps another elevator could be installed to reduce the distance students have to travel.

4. Classroom signage is provided but above eye level and with no braille options. For those with visual impairments finding a specific classroom might be difficult. A refresh of classroom signs would ideally include installation of lower signs on or around door handles that include braille.
5. Some classroom doors are much narrower than normal causing reduced entrance and exit points for those with mobility challenges. Future renovation could see regular door frames installed.
6. While the school does have ramp access from the street and the parking lot, there is no direct ramp from the drop off area to the front doors of the school. An installation of a tiered ramp from the main cul-de-sac to the front door is recommended.
7. Some classrooms, particularly those under the weight room, the band room and the choir room have noise issues that make it difficult for some students and staff to learn and function. Noise reduction solutions would be helpful to address this noise issue.
8. Heating and cooling can sometimes be an issue for some classrooms. This can seriously impact teaching and learning. The second floor classrooms that are south facing become significantly warmer in the spring and early fall months. Fans have been provided to some classrooms. Planned installation of window tinting and window air conditioning units is planned for the 2025-26 school year. Future investment in heat pump air conditioning is proposed and being inspected.

### **Attitudinal Barriers**

1. Students may feel misunderstood by staff who make assumptions that they were lazy or uncooperative or lacked motivation, when in fact they were dealing with mental health and other disabilities that made it difficult for them to work, learn and communicate. The Director of Student Services and Administration always communicate to staff when alerted to concerns, however often families or parents do not communicate to families.
2. Parents, families, and students often feel a stigma surrounding support from the LRC department or asking for help. This single barrier often causes students to not be able to

access services that they require.

3. Teachers often view UDL support for all students as unfair advantages. Sometimes UDL support is withheld if a student does not have an IEP.
4. In recent years our LRC department has encountered families who have been advised by their family doctors to not divulge information regarding a student's challenges for fear of stigma or marginalization.

### **Resource Barriers**

1. Some teachers and students are not familiar with the accessibility features on school laptops/computers such as voice-to-text, text to voice, web readers and other features.

### **School Policy and Practice Barriers**

1. There is a need for further staff training to understand and better support different learning needs.
2. There is a need for further staff training to understand the application of UDL supports for all students.

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

### **Overview:**

This Accessibility Plan outlines the measures CISVA Schools (See Appendix C for a list of schools included in this plan) will take to remove or prevent barriers to learning and participation and to promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in our school community. 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 and defined in Section 1.

### **Accessibility Priorities:**

Information about accessibility was gathered through the Physical and Environment Audit and continues to be gathered from staff, parents/guardians, and students. Based on this information and the need to develop a long-term process the initial priorities have been set. Priorities will be updated upon completion and from feedback received from members in the school community.

#### **Priority #1: Physical Accessibility Audit of each School Facility**

By September 1, 2023, all CISVA schools and affiliate schools will conduct a thorough audit of the school facility using the 9-page SCSBC audit checklist. The CISVA will gather and summarize the information provided by all schools and provide each school a summary of their response's vs the collective whole. This information will form the basis and prioritize next steps to address accessibility needs of the school facility in a three-year plan that culminates June 30, 2026. The plan will be posted on the school website.

#### **Priority #2: Development of a CISVA Accessibility Committee**

In 2023-24, the CISVA will form and register an Accessibility committee. The committee will begin to develop an accessibility plan for CISVA schools.

### **Priority #3: Physical and Architectural Environment**

CISVA Schools will work to improve the accessibility of the physical and architectural environment for all individuals, including those with disabilities. This will include items that were identified in the Physical Accessibility Audit completed by each school.

### **Priority #4: Policy and Practice**

St. Thomas More Collegiate and the CISVA will review and revise policies and practices to ensure they align with the principles of accessibility, and to address any identified gaps in staff training or knowledge on accessibility issues.

### **Priority #5: Development of Feedback Mechanism**

The CISVA Accessibility Committee will develop a feedback mechanism to share with our schools to gather information on the plan, this information will serve as one of the guides for future plans.

## Section 8: Monitoring and Evaluation

The Accessibility Committee meets 4 times yearly, or as required, to review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation and plan for increased accessibility throughout CISVA schools. The committee will ensure the following steps are taken regarding the Three-Year Accessibility Plan:

1. Prepare an annual status report on the progress of the measures taken to implement the plan. This will be reported at the AGM.
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 about the Plan

Accessible formats of the plan will be made available upon request. Questions, comments, or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to either STMC or to the CISVA Accessibility Committee. There is a feedback form available on both the school and the CISVA website.

## 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 modifying 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 modifying 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 colours, 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 have to pay attention at all times. Refrain from engaging with the animal.
- If you're giving directions or verbal information, be precise and clear. For example, if you're approaching a door or an obstacle, say so. Don't just assume the individual can't 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. Don't 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-lighted 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 been understood.
- Service animals are working and have to pay attention at all times. 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've said.
- If you can't understand what's 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 a host of 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're 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 anyone else. You won't know that the person has a mental health disability unless you're informed of it. But if someone is experiencing difficulty in controlling their symptoms or is in a crisis, you may need to help out. 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 persons 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 doesn't mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking; make no assumption they have an intellectual disability as well.
- If you don't 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’s an emergency, refrain from touching a deaf-blind person without permission.

## **Appendix B: Suggested References/Resources**

### **Canadian and Local Accessibility Context and Legislation**

[Accessible British Columbia Act](#)

[BC Accessibility Legislation Plan Language Summary](#)

[British Columbia Framework for Accessibility Legislation](#)

[Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)

[Canada Ratifies the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

### **Accessibility Planning Resources for Schools**

[A Guide to Creating Accessible Play Spaces](#) (Rick Hansen Foundation)

[Accessible Resource Centre - BC](#)

[BC Accessibility Hub](#)

[BC Association for Advancing Communications](#)

[Brain Injury Canada](#)

[Canadian National Institute for the Blind \(CNIB\)](#)

[Canadian Hard of Hearing Association](#)

[Canadian Hearing Services](#)

[Comprehensive literacy for all: Teaching students with significant disabilities to read and write](#)

[Creating an Accessibility Committee](#)

[Gifted Children's Association of BC](#)

[Kelty Mental Health \(BC Children's Hospital\)](#)

[Learning Disabilities Association of Canada](#)

[Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada](#)

[Rick Hansen Accessibility Advisory Services](#)

[Rick Hansen Accessibility Resources for Building Accessibility](#)

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

[Spinal Cord Injury Canada](#)

[Tourette Canada](#)

[Undoing Ableism: Teaching about disability in K-12 Classrooms](#)

[Universal Design](#)

**BC Provincial Resource Programs:**

[Auditory Outreach Provincial Resource Program](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Potential Grant Sources**

[BC Gaming Grants](#)

[Disability Alliance BC Accessibility Projects](#)

[Enabling Accessibility Fund](#)

[Rick Hansen Accessibility Grant](#)

### **Accessibility Products**

[Accessible Places](#) (B.C. Distributor of Evac Chairs/Slings)

Advice about Placement of Automatic Door Openers [alfred@accessibleplaces.ca](mailto:alfred@accessibleplaces.ca)

## Appendix C: List of CISVA Schools

St. Francis of Assisi	Our Lady of Sorrows
Notre Dame Regional Secondary	St Jude's School, St.
St. Bernadette School	Mary's Elementary School – Vancouver
Corpus Christi School	St. Andrew's School
St. Anthony of Padua School	St. Paul School
Sacred Heart School	St. Joseph the Worker Elementary School
Star of the Sea School	Immaculate Conception Delta School
Our Lady of Good Counsel	Holy Cross Regional Secondary School
Cloverdale Catholic School	St. Catherine's School
St. James Elementary School	St. John Brebeuf Regional Secondary
St. Mary's School-Chilliwack	St. Patrick's Elementary School – Maple Ridge
Our Lady of the Assumption	Archbishop Carney Regional Secondary School
Queen of All Saints	Our Lady of Fatima School
St. Michael's School	Our Lady of Mercy
St. Francis de Sales	Holy Cross Elementary School
St. Helen's Elementary School	St. Pius X Elementary School
St. Edmund's School	St. Thomas Aquinas Regional Secondary School
Holy Trinity	St. Anthony's West Vancouver
St. Augustine's School	Our Lady of Perpetual Help
Blessed Sacrament	Immaculate Conception Vancouver
St. Patrick's Regional School	St. Patrick's Elementary School
St. Joseph's School	St. Francis Xavier School
Assumption School	St. Matthew's Elementary
Seminary of Christ the King	*Vancouver College
*Saint John Paul II Academy	*Saint Thomas More Collegiate
*Little Flower Academy	

*\*Denotes Affiliate Schools*