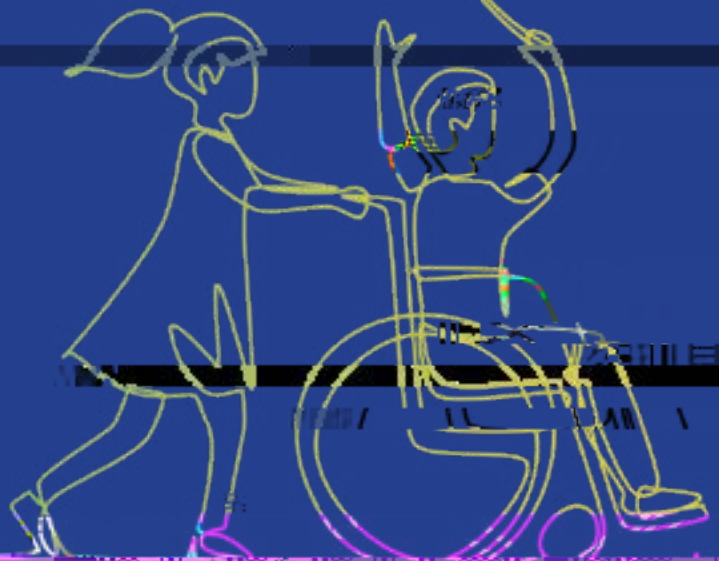


Greater Victoria School District Accessibility Plan 2023—2026



One Learning Community

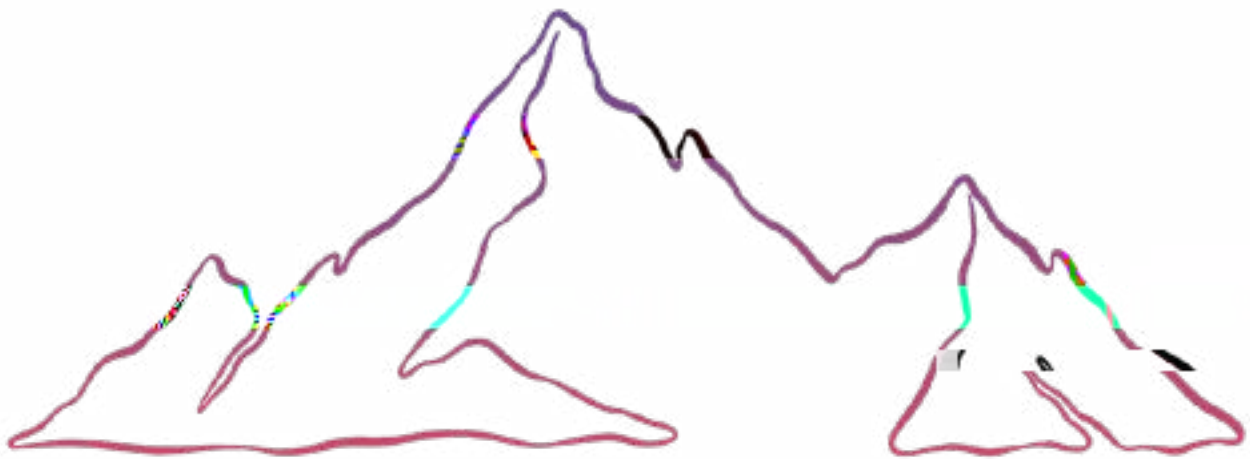


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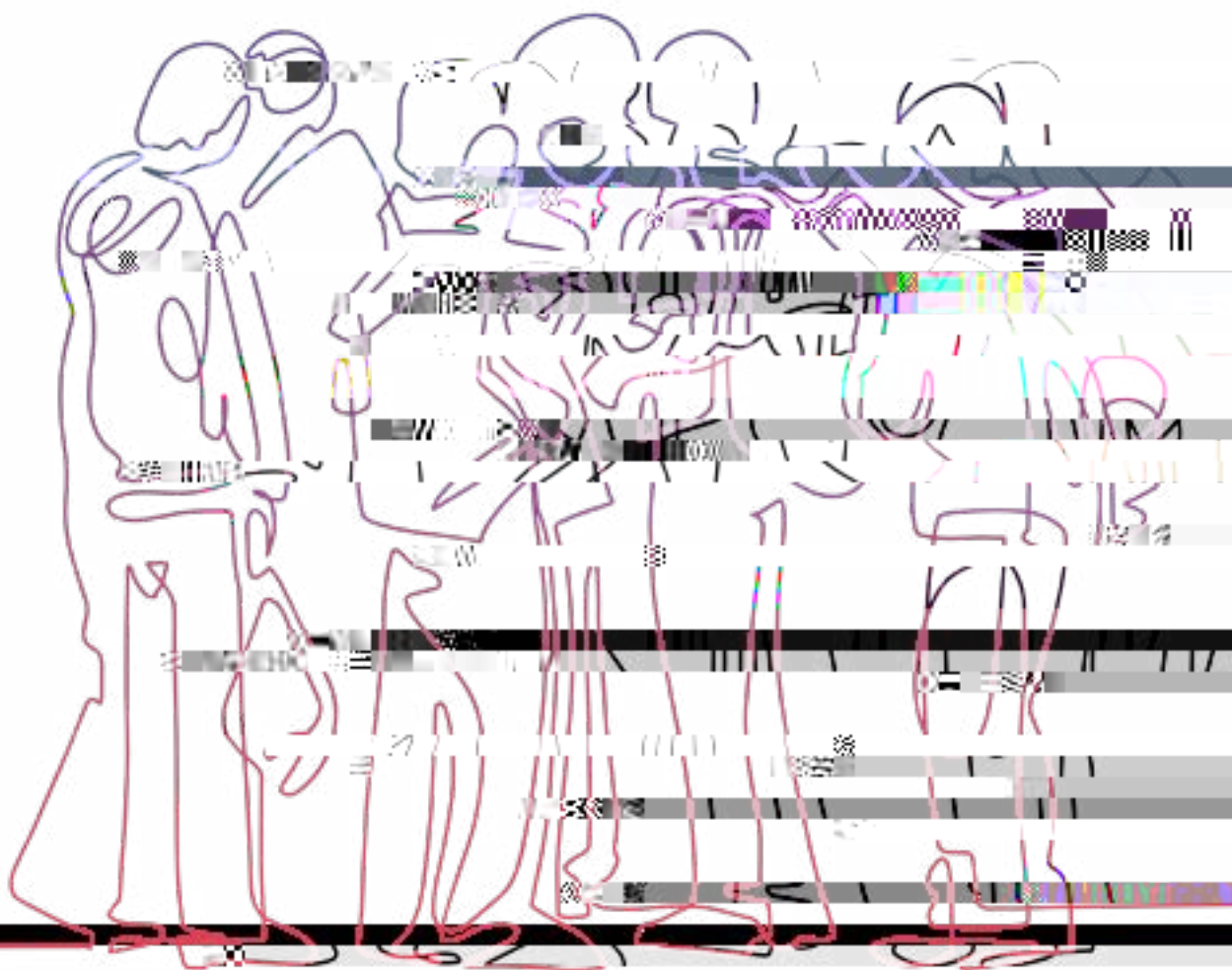
The Greater Victoria School District No. 61 (GVSD) resides on the traditional territory of the lək'wəŋən (Lekwungen) people. We would like to recognize and acknowledge the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, on whose traditional territories we live, we learn, and we do our work. Hay'sxw'qa—thank you.



Inroduction

In the Greater Victoria School District, we are committed to providing a responsive and safe learning and working environment that supports all students and staff and provides equitable opportunities to support our diverse community.

GVSD is committed to supporting Indigenous learners by promoting practices informed by Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing. Our partnerships with local Indigenous communities are formalized through the education agreements we have with the Songhees First Nation, Esquimalt First Nation, Métis Nation Greater Victoria (MNGV) and the Urban Peoples' House Indigenous Advisory (UPHIA).



Message from the Superintendent

I am pleased to share the Greater Victoria School District's Three-Year Accessibility Plan, an important provincially mandated initiative that supports our commitment to creating inclusive and welcoming environments for every member of our learning community. As a learning community, GVSD is deeply committed to each student and staff having the opportunity to fulfill their potential and pursue their aspirations. This commitment requires us to ensure that all parts of our district are accessible, including our communications, programs and services, and learning and working environments, not only for those with disabilities and/or accessibility needs, but also for the benefit of the entire community.

The actions in this Three-Year Accessibility Plan will serve as our road map as we work to develop a learning and working environment that equitably supports all students, staff, and the larger school community.



Deb Whitten

Superintendent, Greater Victoria School District

Types of barriers

- **Physical/Environmental Barrier** A barrier resulting from building design, smells/sounds, lighting, the area adjacent to the building, shape of rooms, the size of doorways, and so on.
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- **Policy or Practice Barrier** Rules, regulations, and protocols that prevent a person from performing the essential elements of their job, classwork, or participating in society. Policy, practice, and procedures that prevent a student from accessing the curriculum and fully participating in the school community.
- **Technological Barrier** Barriers resulting from inaccessible devices, platforms, software programs, computers, photocopiers, fax machines, telephones, and switches, including the lack of assistive technologies.
- **Disability** The state of being unable to participate fully and equally in society as a result of the interaction between an impairment and a barrier. (For more information about disability and types of disability and support, refer to [A](#), [A Ab](#), [D](#), [ab](#).)
- **Impairment** A physical, sensory, mental, intellectual,

Framework Guiding our Work

The GVSD accessibility plan builds on global, national, provincial, and school district specific actions to promote and support accessibility.

Global, United Nations, National

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 CRPD 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 Accessibility Legislation, Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

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.

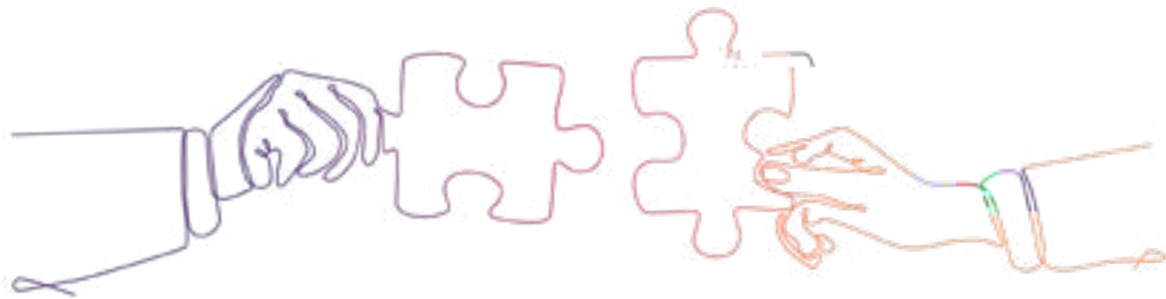
4. All persons must have meaningful options and be free to make their own choices, with support if they desire, regardless of their disabilities.
5. Laws, policies, programs, services, and structures must take into account the disabilities of persons, the different ways that persons interact with their 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.

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The Accessible British Columbia Act, enacted in June 2021, and initially the accessibility planning requirements only applied to

acknowledge the principle of intersectionality and the diversity within the disability community.

- **Inclusion** All British Columbians, including persons with disabilities, should be able to participate fully and equally in their communities.
- **Self Determination** Accessibility plans should seek to empower people with disabilities to make their own choices and pursue the lives they wish to live.
- **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 Approach

In the Greater Victoria School District, 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), and is designed to recognize the gaps and opportunities to improve accessibility in our community.

In the spring of 2023, a District Accessibility Working Group, consisting of key staff from the departments responsible for implementing identified recommendations and actions was established. In the summer and early fall of 2023, we began drafting the district accessibility plan and planning for the establishment of the Accessibility Advisory Group.

Accessibility Advisory Group

Part 1: Accessibility Advisory Group

Under the Accessible B.C. Act, organizations must establish an accessibility advisory group to assist with identifying and preventing

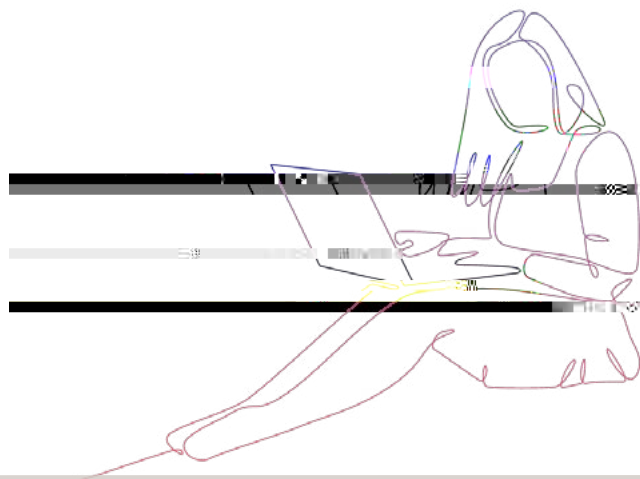
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Barrier Identification and Consultation Conducted

The following methods are being used to identify barriers:

- District Accessibility Feedback Tool—A feedback tool was developed and posted to the district website. Information about the tool was shared with district and school stakeholders (i.e., students, staff, outside professionals, and parents/guardians).





Accessibility Accomplishments and Barriers

Accessibility Barriers

The guiding principles of inclusive practice inform the Greater Victoria's School District's programs, policies, practices, and services to reduce and minimize barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities and/or accessibility needs. We strive to create an environment that is accessible and to ensure continuous improvement in accessibility.

Included below are initial discussion themes on accessibility accomplishments. They are a synopsis of some of the accomplishments gathered through conversations with members of the Accessibility Advisory Group and district school administrators. These will be expanded upon when additional data is available.

Information and Accessibility

- Information on the accessibility act has been shared with students, parents/guardians, community members, and district staff through the district website.
- District website includes google translate as an accessibility feature.
- Increased awareness of and access to communications in various formats is increasing. For example—braille signage in schools, communication boards on playgrounds, enhanced collaboration with Intercultural Association of Victoria.
- A Welcome Centre for newcomers has been created as an entry point for immigrant and refugee students new to Victoria and to support a successful transition into local schools through a trauma informed lens.

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- Ongoing collaboration between the Departments of Facilities and Learning Support to ensure that physical environment accommodations required by a student occur in a timely manner.
- Consideration of accessible environments is a component of new school construction or renovation.
- The Inclusion for Learning Strategy has enabled the district to take an inventory and make improvements to accessibility at a number of schools, including the creation of alternate learning spaces for students, workspaces for staff, and the creation of accessible washrooms.
- Creation of purpose-built Indigenous spaces in schools.

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- Children and Youth in Care Standard of Practice created to better track and support Children and Youth in Care in GVSD.
- Increased access to Non-Violent Crisis Intervention (NCI) training for all staff.
- Targeted transition supports are in place to support identified students (e.g., Spring-Up).
- Several initiatives are in place to improve the mental health and well-being of students and staff including a partnership with PISE to support student and family physical and mental health and the provision of mental wellness resources and training for every grade.

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- Each school has a School-Based Team who collaborate with District Learning Support Staff to assess and respond to student accommodation requirements on a case-by-case basis.
- Practices and procedures are in place to ensure support is provided for learners with and without formal special education designations.
- Enhanced early learning support is provided through Early Childhood Educators and the District Principal for Early Learning.
- The district provides comprehensive transition processes for students by collaborating with external childcare agencies and through increased opportunity for dialogue at onsite childcare centres.
- The increased adoption of Universal Design for learning

Accessibility

- There is a greater and growing awareness and general understanding of accessibility and disability, with staff pursuing professional learning focused on how to better support learners with disabilities, and/or use a trauma-informed approach.

Accessibility Barriers

Included below are initial discussion themes on accessibility barriers. They are a synopsis of some of the barriers noted through conversations with members of the Accessibility Advisory Group and district school administrators. These will be expanded upon when additional data is available.

Information Accessibility Barriers

- Some community members identified that it was difficult to navigate the school and district websites and to locate information they hoped to access.
- Several people with low vision and with English as a second language had to rely on family members to read or translate information on the websites.
- Email communication to parents/guardians and staff are not always written in language that is easy to understand and is sometimes confusing.

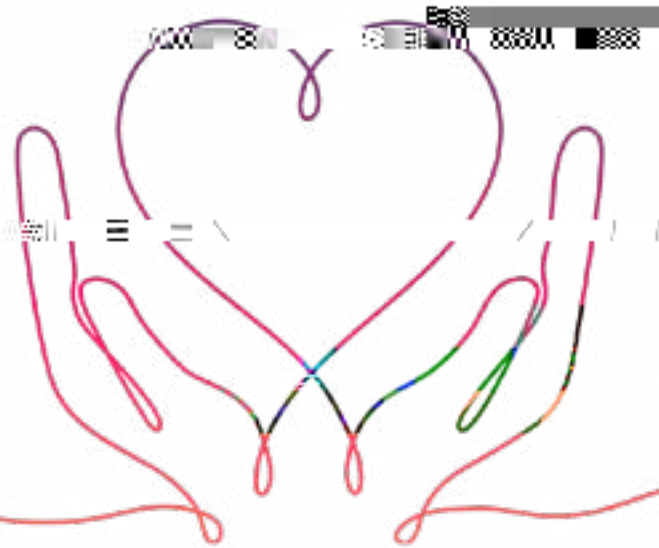
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Attitudinal

- Attitudinal barriers still exist, such as a lack of awareness and understanding of the diverse array of disabilities, from visible to invisible, from physical to mental.



Our Three Year Plan

Our Accessibility Plan outlines the measures that the Greater Victoria School District will take to remove and prevent barriers and to promote inclusion for individuals with disabilities and/or accessibility needs in our school district 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.

As part of their work in the spring of 2024, the Accessibility Advisory Group will review and gather information from the survey and district accessibility feedback tool.

The Accessibility Advisory Group will then identify the top three priorities for improving accessibility in the school district and advise the Accessibility Working Group on recommended initiatives and action plans.

M e a s u r e s a n d E a s e

The Accessibility Advisory Group will meet quarterly to review progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the plan's implementation and plan for increased accessibility throughout the school. The Advisory Group 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.
2. Review and update the Three-Year Accessibility Plan every three years in consultation with persons with disabilities and other relevant community members.



How to Get Your Feedback

In addition to the public availability of the plan, the Greater Victoria School District will continue to post an annual status report on the progress of the Three-Year Accessibility Plan on the district website. Accessible formats of the plan will be made available upon request.

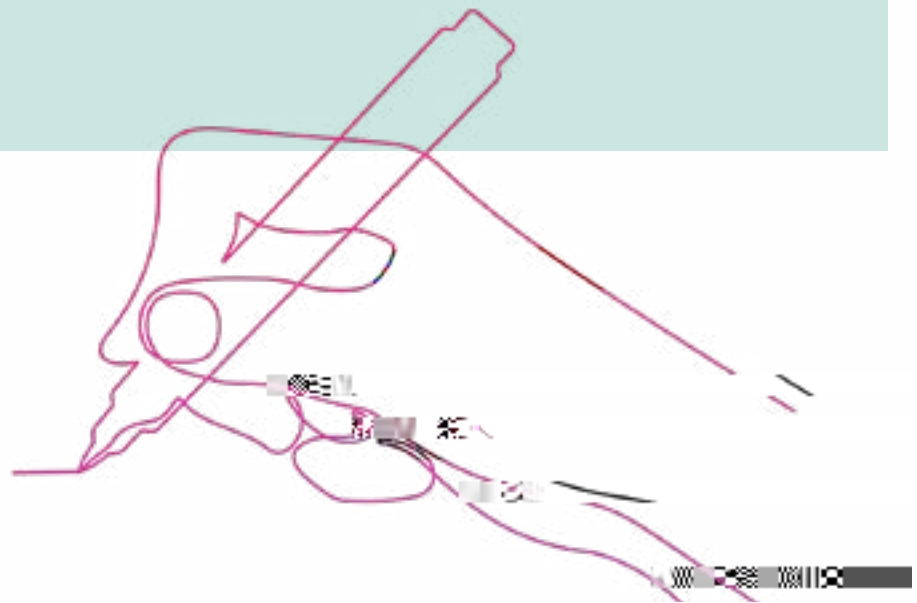
Questions, comments or feedback regarding the Accessibility Plan may be directed to

Sean McCartney

District Principal, Greater Victoria School District

sean.mccartney@gvsd.bc.ca

250-475-4120



Appendix A About Disability

Understanding Disability

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 Barriers and Examples

A person's disability may make it physically or cognitively challenging to perform everyday tasks such as operating a keyboard, reading a sign, diff

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.

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.
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- 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.
-

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 them to tell you the best way to help.
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Appendix B Suggestions and References/ Resources

Guidance, Case Law, and L.A. C.A. L.A.

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