



UNIT-2

Accessibility

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

Unit 2

Accessibility

Physical Access

Accessibility refers to making your workplace, and your business, available to people. It means that parking spaces, doorways, washrooms, service counters, and people are useable to workers and customers alike.

Depending on where you live, there are likely laws which require you to have certain accessibility features available. Check with your regional government. We'll go through some typical ones here.

Parking

You will usually find that the number of total parking spaces dictates that a certain number of spaces are designated for disabled parking and that they are the closest spaces to the door. (Regulations differ by region.) Remember that some disabled workers will drive large vehicles to transport a wheelchair or motorized scooter. These vehicles and their lifts sometimes require additional width for maneuverability.

Spaces for disabled parking need to be clearly marked so that they are available for disabled drivers. This is the international symbol for accessibility:



Ramps

There's not much point in creating accessible parking spaces unless everyone can get in the building. Ramps need to be in place so that people can get from their vehicles to the building. They also need to be kept in excellent repair and free of snow, ice, and debris.

Doorways

Doors must meet certain criteria in order to be considered accessible. Again, this varies between regions, but all doorways need to be wide enough to allow a wheelchair. (32 inches is standard in North America.) The door opening force needs to be as low as possible so that people can open the door independently, even if they are usually assisted with an electronic motor.

Restrooms

There should be accessible restrooms throughout the workplace (usually one stall within a multi-stall washroom). Single stall washrooms should have handrails, accessible sinks, towel holders, soap dispensers, etc. If you are not sure whether your restrooms are adequate, make sure to ask people who are using them to give you some feedback.

Barriers

People with disabilities face many barriers when it comes to work. Many of these are perpetuated by attitudes. Some of us feel sorry for people with disabilities, while others feel parental toward them. Old attitudes about people with disabilities not being able to contribute don't help either. We have built stereotypes around so many things. These stereotypes also contribute to the notion that things (including people) must be a certain ideal to do anything – work, drive, or be our friends, for example.

Feeling sorry for people with disabilities can lead to patronizing them. What we really want to do with this course is open up your receptors and show that people with disabilities do not need patronizing. Just like everyone else, they need to make a living, look after themselves and their families, and to do so with dignity.

The Cornerstones of Diversity

About the Cornerstones

Diversity experts Armida Russell, Amy Tolbert, and Frank Wilderman have identified four cornerstones of diversity development. They are knowledge, acceptance, understanding, and behavior. We'll apply these in a disability awareness context.

Knowledge

The best way to battle stereotypes is to inform yourself about the truth. Some activities you can do on a personal level include:

- Get to know people with disabilities.
- Take classes with a focus on understanding disability issues, especially those related to employment.
- Travel to different places and see how people with disabilities are treated and live.
- Work with different support organizations to learn more about the world you live and work in.
- Involve yourself with people that your own stereotypes could apply to. Find out what they're really like.

Test Your Knowledge

Other Ideas

Acceptance

Acceptance does not mean adopting the behaviors or rituals of a culture or of another person as your own. It also does not mean condoning behaviors that clash with your value system.

Acceptance does mean respecting the values and behaviors of others. Let's say that we need to schedule team meetings and I feel that the best time to do this is before the day starts, at 8 am every morning. However, Roger has a conflict: he attends physiotherapy every morning before work. Although I don't work out, and don't have a disability to manage, I can respect the fact that Roger has this commitment. Rather than ask Roger to alter his physiotherapy appointment, I can respect it and schedule the meeting for another time.

Developing acceptance can open up a whole new range of possibilities for everyone involved. To start, if you listen with an open mind, you'll probably learn something about your colleague. And, when different viewpoints are exchanged in a respectful manner, amazing ideas are bound to result. This respectful, healthy exchange builds respect and communication skills, resulting in a stronger team.

Behavior

Now that all the pieces are in place, you can begin to change your behavior and influence what happens in your workplace.

Test Your Knowledge

Your company has beer and pizza every Friday at lunch. Everybody likes to go to the Purple Bee, which is located on the second floor of an old building downtown. There is no elevator there.

You're in a training class and you've noticed that one person is being excluded from the activities, seemingly because they have difficulty speaking as quickly as other people do.

Some of the other members of your team are making jokes about their colleague's use of a wheelchair, social skills, or style of dress.
