

Parent Tips on Accessibility during Transitions

Note: This information is available in Farsi, French, Punjabi, Simplified Chinese and Spanish from the links at the end of the article.

For many students with a disability, accessibility at school is a major concern. Your child may have problems with one or more of the following:

- mobility issues (difficulty moving around a room, or using a walker or wheelchair)
- fine motor skills (finger dexterity or grasp) or
- gross motor skills (large muscle movements like standing, sitting, rolling)
- vision (blindness or low vision)
- hearing (deafness or hard or hearing)
- sensory disorders (increased or decreased sensations of touch, hearing, sight, smell, movement and body awareness)

Concerns about accessibility are likely to occur at each transition point, particularly when starting or changing schools.

Tip 1: Types of Accessibility to Think About:

- Acoustics – auditory support systems such as Sound Fields and FM Systems
- Assistive technology (AT) including computers and software to help with learning
- Buildings – doorways, entrance access, access between levels, fire exits, etc.
- Classrooms – desk size, aisles, windows, computer stations, acoustics, etc.
- Emergency procedures and evacuation

- Library, gymnasium, auditorium (seating and stage), science laboratories, greenhouses, other specialized classrooms
- Playground, sports fields, parking lots
- Sensory spaces and equipment to improve or reduce sensory stimulation
- Transportation – school bus or other types of transportation
- Visual supports – large print materials, lighting, use of colour to improve visual contrast, or emergency lights
- Washrooms and changing rooms – change tables, size, sinks, taps, showers, mirrors, etc.

Tip 2: Starting at a New School:

- Meet with school staff to discuss your child's needs and any barriers that have been identified
- Visit the new school and ask questions to find out about accessibility
- Share any ideas or resources that you have about improving accessibility
- Find out what the school plans to improve accessibility for your child and when the changes will be made
- If you are not satisfied with the accessibility plan for your child, for example some areas of the school may be inaccessible for your child, ask for another meeting with the school or with more senior staff

Tip 3: Once Your Child has Started at the School:

- Check to make sure all of the accessibility concerns have been addressed. If you have concerns talk to the teacher or ask for a meeting with the Principal
- Maintain regular communication with the school staff and address concerns as they arise

Tip 4: Emergency Evacuation:

Some emergency plans for multi-story building, require students to gather near a stairwell or an “are of refuge” (safe location) within the building to wait for help.

- Review the emergency evacuation plan for your child with the teacher.
- Find out who will be in charge and how students will be evacuated in an emergency

Tip 5: Specialized Classrooms:

Some specialized classrooms for technical subjects, such as physics or chemistry, horticulture, mechanics or media studies, may be more difficult to navigate or have equipment that the student may not be able to use. A volunteer or co-op placement outside of the school may also present accessibility challenges for the student.

In each of these situations the parent may need to:

- Identify accessibility concerns
- Meet with school staff to discuss concerns and identify solutions
- Work together to remove barriers and support the student’s participation
- Recognize that sometimes the barriers can not be addressed in the short term and that the student may have to choose another course or different placement

Tip 6: Involve the Student:

As they get older, students should be encouraged to be involved when there are accessibility problems.

- Ask your child about the new school/class and what problems they are having with getting around the room or building
- Talk to your child about the problem and how their accessibility could be improved

- Invite older children to school meetings or discussions about accessibility
- When your child is ready, let them take the lead in problem solving with school staff and advocating for changes to improve their access to classrooms and programs

Tip 7: Know Your Rights:

Ontario has legislation to protect the rights of people with disabilities and requires accommodations to be provided. Your child has the same right to the same quality of life as someone without a disability and schools, employers, and public agencies have a “duty to accommodate” (to make the changes to accommodate your child’s needs).

- Find out about your legal rights and key legislation, including the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act, Ontario Human Rights Code.

Helpful Websites:

- **Accessibility for Ontarians With Disabilities Act (OADA):** aoda.ca
- **ARCH Disability Law Centre:** archdisabilitylaw.ca
 - Education Law
- **Ontario Human Rights Commission:** ohrc.on.ca
 - Guidelines on Accessible Education
- **Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services:** mcss.gov.on.ca
 - Making Ontario Accessible

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