



Classroom Accessibility Allies



Overview

Classroom Accessibility Allies is designed to help teachers guide students through a structured, hands-on process of noticing, addressing and reflecting on barriers to accessibility. It emphasizes inclusion as both a classroom practice and a community mindset.

What's Inside

1

Quick Start Guide (page 3)

A step-by-step lesson flow teachers can follow in under 90 minutes (from checklist to action plan and ending with reflection).

2

Background Information (page 4-7)

Teacher notes on why accessibility matters and accessibility considerations.

3

Accessibility Checklist (page 8-9)

A student-facing tool to identify barriers in vision, hearing, and mobility disabilities as well as neurodiversity.

4

Action Plan Template & Resources (page 10-11)

A structured way for students to document barriers, brainstorm solutions, assign next steps, and practical resources for further reading.

5

Reflection Form (page 12-13)

Prompts for group reflection, including how changes made a difference and tips for other classrooms.

6

Extension and Next Steps (page 14-15)

Optional deeper learning activities and community accessibility checklist for exploring beyond the classroom.

Quick Start Guide

Step 1. Get Ready (10 minutes)

- Skim the background information (pages 4-7)
 - Share why accessibility matters with students to ground the exercise (refer to page 4)
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Step 2. Complete the Accessibility Checklist (20-30 minutes)

- Walk through the Accessibility Checklist with your class (page 8-9)
 - Read each item aloud, have students answer yes or no for each checklist item, then identify 2-3 “no” barriers to improve
 - **Note:** many barriers that may exist in some schools require costly repairs, renovations or installations to meaningfully improve accessibility, however, this checklist is designed to address no-cost and low-cost barriers to accessibility that can be improved with simple solutions so your class can take direct action.
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Step 3. Make an Action Plan (20-30 minutes)

- Use the Action Plan Template (page 10)
 - Have students write or draw the barriers you found, brainstorm the possible solutions, identify who will help remove or improve the barrier, and what your next steps are.
 - Choose 1-2 changes to try right away
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Step 4. Reflect Together (15 minutes)

- Complete the Reflection Form as a group (page 12-13)
 - Younger students can draw or dictate; older students can write
 - With consent, send photos, videos, drawings, posters or short stories of your class in action and submit to us online to earn your certificate and have your project celebrated on RHF and CNIB social media channels!
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Step 5. Extend the Learning (Optional)

- Create a bulletin board, extend your allyship to the community, book a CNIB or RHF presentation

Background Information

Why Accessibility Matters

Each year, thousands of children and youth who have disabilities may face frustration, low self-esteem, and isolation that often stem from a lack of inclusion. The problem continues to become more prevalent as the population of youth with disabilities continues to rise. In 2022, 20% of Canadian youth had a disability, compared to 13% in 2017. One meaningful way teachers can address this is by integrating messages about inclusion, modeling inclusive strategies in their everyday instruction, as well as recognizing and introducing accessibility as a human right.

When the needs of students with disabilities are overlooked in any part of the school community, it not only impacts the well-being and learning opportunities of those students but also affects the overall school climate and peer relationships. When there is a lack of inclusion in the classroom, it can hinder both academic success and social

development, creating barriers that prevent students from reaching their full potential.

Schools are spaces of belonging where every student, regardless of ability, can thrive. This includes encouraging academic growth as well as social and emotional development. Classrooms can serve as powerful environments where all students learn not only curriculum content but also how to interact respectfully with peers of differing abilities. Lessons, classroom activities, and even games can and should be adapted to ensure that everyone is meaningfully included.

To truly support students with disabilities, it is important to recognize that disabilities exist on a spectrum. Inclusion requires not only adapting materials and environments but also seeking and valuing the lived experiences and input of the students themselves.



Accessibility Considerations

Signage and wayfinding

For someone who is blind or has low vision, large signs with large font size, sans serif fonts and high contrast colours (e.g. white letters on black background) are helpful. People who are blind or have low vision may be able to see colours, shapes, and large text. Braille on all signs is helpful for those who read it, as are signs that make noises, such as crosswalk signals.

For people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing, clear signage is important for navigating spaces. Signs and maps help someone with a hearing disability in cases of emergency.

While signs help people with a hearing disability, long written text is not always optimal, as English might not be the primary language of someone who is d/Deaf. Visual and pictorial signs can be very useful.

NOTE: Many people who are Deaf use American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary language, so while written material is helpful, lengthy text might still be difficult to understand, similar to reading documents in a foreign language. If providing written information, it is helpful to ensure it is clear and concise.

Clocks are another important visual tool. If you are a student at school who is d/Deaf or hard of hearing, you might not be able to hear the bells. You need a clock to keep track of time in places like classrooms and the library.

Displaying students' names in a classroom helps students with a hearing disability learn their classmates' names. It is a very basic but important way to have all students involved in the social dynamics of a classroom.



Noise and echo

For people who are blind or have low vision, spaces are more accessible when there are no competing noises. Because written instructions and visual cues are difficult or impossible to see, auditory cues and the ability to hear these cues is important.

Even if you have a hearing disability, you might be able to hear some sounds. For people who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing, ambient noises, such as traffic or echoes, can interfere with sound. A quiet classroom without noise helps you hear as much as possible.

Smooth vs. textured surfaces

For someone who is blind or has low vision and for someone who uses a mobility device, smooth surfaces without objects or ledges in the path are ideal. For example, playgrounds are more accessible if they do not use stones, gravel or woodchips and do not have a curb around the play area. Loose surfaces, curbs, and ledges are all safety hazards and barriers to inclusion.

Similarly, consistent indoor flooring makes a space more accessible. Flooring that includes area carpets can create a hazard because the carpets can move.

For someone who is blind or has low vision, stairs that have textured strips or grooved edges, ideally in a high-contrast colour, are important indicators of where one stair ends and another begins. Sturdy handrails that are round and sufficiently far from the wall allow for easy gripping. Railings are also used to understand where a staircase begins, ends, and turns.



Physical access

For someone with a limb difference affecting their upper extremities, such as not having hands or fingers, or for someone who has a muscular condition, round doorknobs are much harder to manipulate (hold, turn, and push) than door handles that are levers.

For someone who uses a wheelchair or has a disability affecting their hands, it is easier to push open doors than it is to pull open doors. Also, lighter weight doors are easier to use than heavier doors. A heavy door that requires you to pull needs to be power-operated to be accessible.

For someone who uses a wheelchair or walker it is important to have ramp or elevator access where there are stairs. Doorways should be wide enough, ideally 34 inches of width, to allow mobility aids to pass through.

For someone who uses a wheelchair or mobility device, grab rails and ample space in a washroom stall are necessary for independence.

For individuals that are d/Deaf or hard of hearing that speak ASL, it is important that spaces can be entered and used without needing to talk to someone, otherwise, someone needs to be present who knows ASL.

Personal assistance

For someone who uses a wheelchair, it is important that another person or staff member be present in areas where objects are often out of reach (e.g. a library with books on shelves).

For those who are blind or have low vision, a greeter or staff member may be necessary to help guide someone through an unfamiliar space. Guiding might mean physically helping someone navigate a space or verbally explaining the layout and where items are. It's important to ask the person if they would like to be guided, and how. Individuals will have different ways they like to be guided; some may prefer to take the inside of your elbow while others may prefer a hand on your shoulder. The

more confusing the layout of the space, the more difficult it is to mentally visualize it and navigate without assistance.

When guiding someone or giving directions, be as specific as possible. Instead of saying, "The door is over there," or pointing and gesturing, say: "The door is on your right, about 20 feet down the hallway." Avoid using visual cues when giving directions like "It's beside the red bag," and don't forget to describe things from the person's perspective, not yours.

When you are speaking with someone who is blind or has low vision, ensure you introduce yourself or identify who is speaking.

Smartphones, Computers, Tablets and Assistive Devices



Smartphones, computers and tablets have unique built-in features like text-to-speech, screen readers, magnification, and larger text to help people who are blind or have low vision. There are also lots of cool apps that can do things like describe what's happening in a photo, help people find their way around using voice directions, or even read books aloud! These features and apps make it easier for people who are blind or have low vision to read, learn, and explore on their own, whether electronically or online.

For someone with a limb difference affecting hands or fingers or for someone who has a muscular condition, keyboard aids such as typing sticks may make typing on computers easier. Typing might be much easier to do than writing with a pencil for people with certain disabilities, such as cerebral palsy.

Furniture

For someone who uses a wheelchair, moveable desks, tables and chairs are important for creating space for a wheelchair. It's important to keep pathways clear. This is true in classrooms as well as communal spaces, where a parent or grandparent who uses a mobility aid might want to watch their child perform in a school play or concert.

Accessibility Checklist

Spend time auditing the accessibility features of your classroom by answering the following questions with either “**yes**” or “**no**”.

Vision

- Can everyone access classroom information and labels clearly?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Is text on the board and on posters large and high-contrast (dark text on light background, or light on dark)?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Are pathways and exits clearly marked and free of clutter?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Are classroom materials like handouts and worksheets available in large print or digital versions?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Do objects or areas have tactile labels (where helpful)?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Do classmates give detailed directions?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Do classmates introduce themselves when speaking?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

Hearing

- Can everyone hear and understand instructions and discussions?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Does the teacher speak clearly and face the class when giving instructions?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Are videos shown with captions on?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Is background noise kept to a minimum during lessons?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Is seating arranged to help students who are hard of hearing (front row, circle, U-shape)?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Are alternative ways of sharing instructions provided (written or visual cues)?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



Mobility

- Can everyone move safely and comfortably around the room?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Are pathways between desks wide and clear?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Are materials and supplies accessible without needing to reach, climb or bend too far?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**

- Are doorways and entry points free from clutter?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Does the classroom have at least one flexible seating option (desk or table and chairs are not attached)?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Are ramps, elevators, or accessible washrooms known and easy to find?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



Neurodiversity

- Does the school have a quiet or calm space for students who need a break?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Are instructions given in more than one way (spoken, written, visual)?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Are routines and expectations clear and consistent?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Can students choose different ways to showcase their learning?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**
- Is the lighting adaptable (not too bright or flickering)?
☐ **yes** ☐ **no**



Final Step

After completing the checklist, students and teachers choose 2-3 “**no**” items to turn into an action plan.

Action Plan Template

Draw or write your ideas in each section. Use the example to help you.

Barrier We Found:

What is the barrier? Draw or write it here.

Our Solution:

What can we do to fix the barrier? Draw or write it here.

Who Will Help / Next Steps:

Who can help us take action on our solution and what should we do next?

Example:

Barrier We Found: The pathway between desks is too narrow.

Our Solution: Rearrange desks to make more space.

Who Will Help / Next Steps: Students and teacher will move desks after school.

Additional Resources



Teaching Strategies for the Inclusive Classroom



**On the Move: A story about an accessible adventure
(Animated Storybook)**



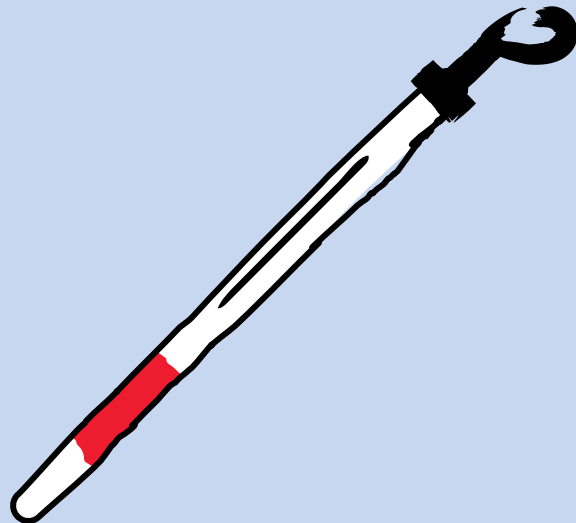
Guide Dog Etiquette 101



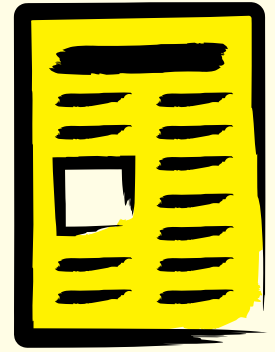
**Step-by-Step: a how-to manual for guiding someone who is
blind or partially sighted**



White Cane Factsheet for Kids



Reflection Form



Once you've completed the checklist and action plan, conclude the project by filling out the **Class Accessibility Reflection** on the following page and sign-off as a class. Younger students can draw or dictate answers; older students can write.

Optional Share-Back (with consent)

Submit your **Class Accessibility Reflection** here to receive your certificate!

Teachers and students may also choose to send photos, drawings, or short stories showing their class in action.

Photos and video can only be shared if teachers, students and parents or guardians all have permission/give consent.

If photos aren't possible, consider sharing:

- A student-created poster or artwork
- Quote wall ("One thing we learned about accessibility is...")

Class Accessibility Reflection

1. What was one barrier we noticed in our classroom?

2. What did we do to fix or improve that barrier?

3. Which change made the biggest difference for our class?

4. What is one thing we can do every day to make sure everyone feels included?

5. If another class asked us for advice, what tip would we share with them about making classrooms more accessible?

Class Sign-Off

Our class worked together to make our classroom more accessible and inclusive.

Signed: _____

Extension & Next Steps

Want to go further with your students?

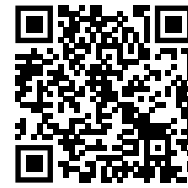
- ✓ Share class learning on bulletin boards or school newsletter
- ✓ Have students complete the **Community Accessibility Checklist** on the following page. Students can evaluate other areas of your school, or their community as a take-home project.
- ✓ Explore additional CNIB and Rick Hansen Foundation School Program lessons and activities or book a speaker



**RHFSP Resource
Library**



**Book a RHF
Ambassador
Presentation**



**Book a CNIB
Inclusive Schools
Presentation**



Community Accessibility Checklist

Instructions

Over the next week, look for signs of accessibility (or barriers) in places you visit outside of class like playgrounds, stores, buses, libraries, community/sports centres, sidewalks, or other areas of your school. Use this checklist to spot what's accessible and what could be improved.

Physical Access

- ☐ Ramps or elevators available and clearly marked where there are stairs
- ☐ Wide doorways and levered handles or automatic/power-operated doors
- ☐ Sidewalks with curb-cuts/ramps at crossings with tactile and brightly colored markings
- ☐ Accessible washrooms
- ☐ Ground smooth and clear of debris

Signs & Communication

- ☐ Signs with clear symbols and large print
- ☐ Braille or tactile signs available
- ☐ Digital displays (e.g. on buses) include audio announcements
- ☐ Audible signals

Inclusive Design

- ☐ Playground with equipment is usable by children of all abilities
- ☐ Seating areas that include space for wheelchairs or mobility devices
- ☐ Public counters or service desks with lowered sections

Technology & Information

- ☐ Captioning on public videos (e.g. in transit stations, community centres)
- ☐ Video description on public videos

Attitudes & Culture

- ☐ Staff who are welcoming and patient
- ☐ People offering help respectfully when someone needs it

Student Reflection Questions

1. Which barrier did you notice the most often?
2. Which place was the most accessible?
3. How does accessibility (or lack of it) affect the way people could participate?
4. If you could change one thing in your school or community to make it more accessible, what would it be?

Optional Extension: Create a class Accessibility Map

Each student adds one location they visited, noting one accessible feature and one barrier. This can spark discussion and connect directly back to the classroom toolkit.



CNIB

cnib.ca

1-800-563-2642

inclusiveschools@cnib.ca

Rick Hansen Foundation

rickhansen.com

1-800-213-2131

schools@rickhansen.com

