



# INTERACTING WITH OUR MEMBERS WITH DISABILITIES

using appropriate language and being sensitive to accommodation preferences



*This guide was developed by APA's Office on Disability Issues to illustrate appropriate ways to interact with our members with disabilities and to most effectively meet their disability-related needs. Although opinions may differ in some areas, the following suggestions represent the current consensus among disability organizations.*

*The Office on Disability Issues is available as a resource for your disability-related questions. As always, however, the best guidance will likely come directly from the member with a disability.*

## DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

### Using Appropriate Terminology

**Put people first, not their disability.** Using appropriate disability terminology will help you maintain respectful and professional relations that are mindful of the disability experience. The term *person with a disability* recognizes the identity of persons with disabilities as persons first and

foremost. Examples of appropriate phraseology include "individuals with epilepsy," "person with mental illness," and "person who is deaf." These preferred expressions avoid the implication that the person as a whole is disabled.

**Do not imply disease when discussing disabilities that result from a prior disease or episode.** People with disabilities should not be referred to as patients or invalids unless their illness status (if any) is under discussion or they are residing in a hospital. Referring to a disease associated with a disability is acceptable only with chronic diseases.

**Use emotionally neutral expressions.** Avoid using such terms as *afflicted with*, *crippled with*, *suffers from*, *victim of*, and so forth. Utilize reaffirming, person-first language such as "individual who had a stroke." Similarly, avoid emotional descriptors such as "unfortunate," "pitiful," etc.

### Encouraging Disclosure

It is important for those of us who work closely with members to cultivate a welcoming and inclusive environment in which members feel comfortable disclosing their disability and any disability-related needs they may

have. Meeting-related information that explicitly welcomes such a dialogue sets an inclusive tone, as does mentioning the availability of materials in alternate formats. The following are examples of messages that can be included in meeting-related correspondence.

- "If you have any disability-related needs, please contact [name] by [time deadline]."
- "Meeting materials are available in alternative format by request. Please contact [name] by [time deadline]."
- "APA values and strives to ensure that all members can participate fully in APA governance. Should you need any modification or accommodation to allow you to effectively participate, please contact [name] by [time deadline]."

### General Tips

- Allow members to discuss their needs in private and invite them to move to a quiet space if necessary. If this is not possible, try lowering your voice and turning your back to the other people to give the feeling of respecting the person's privacy.

- Most people with disabilities are independent and will ask for assistance if they need it. Go ahead and offer assistance, but don't insist.
- If your offer of assistance is accepted, don't be embarrassed to admit that you don't know how to help and ask for instructions.
- Feel free to use words like "walking" or "standing" in conversations with people using wheelchairs, or phrases such as "see you later" when chatting with people who have visual impairments.
- Recognize that service dogs assist individuals with visual, mobility, or hearing impairments; they are working animals responsible for their owners' safety. Never pet the animal or otherwise distract it when the harness is on.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

### Meeting Preparation

Consult with members with disabilities directly to determine their specific needs and give consideration to their expressed preferences and requests. The following are accommodations that APA routinely provides to members with disabilities.

- **Sign language interpreters.** Ask members who are deaf if they prefer a sign language interpreter, and if so, secure the interpreting services in advance of the meetings. Generally, you will need more than one interpreter to allow the interpreters to rotate their work, as this is an intensive and tiring service. Arrange for interpreters' services for all social events and meals, unless otherwise notified.

- **Personal attendants.** Some members with disabilities utilize a personal attendant for assistance with traveling and personal needs. Expenses for a personal attendant are drawn from a central APA fund, and all meals, flights, and work-time costs are reimbursable.
- **Meeting materials in alternate formats.** Ask members who are blind or have low vision for specific details about their needs regarding meeting materials in electronic or other formats.

### Meeting Arrangements Checklist

If you are responsible for making meeting arrangements, have you:

- Included a statement in your meeting materials inviting members with disabilities to identify their disability-related needs?
- Ensured that all meeting and social functions are wheelchair accessible with accessible restrooms and nearby elevators? If meetings and other activities are held above the first floor of the building, then access via elevator is necessary. Carrying persons up steps is NOT acceptable.
- Checked that disability parking is available and there are ramps into buildings and restaurants?
- Ensured that printed materials are also offered in alternative formats (e.g., on CD-ROM or diskette, large print or MS Word format)?
- Assigned an appropriate staff person to meet and orient to the area a participant who is blind or visually impaired?
- Considered room lighting and whether it allows a person who is deaf to see an interpreter's signs and lip movements?
- Made sure that microphones will be used during larger meetings and plenary sessions?
- Arranged tables and chairs so that people who use wheelchairs or scooters can navigate the room easily?

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR PERSONS WITH SPECIFIC DISABILITIES

### Members Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

- Meeting-related information, general notices, and agenda book items and exhibit materials must be circulated electronically whenever possible to those who are blind or visually impaired. Inquire into members' preferred format for meeting-related materials (e.g., electronically in Microsoft Word, on CD-ROM, etc.). Many people who are blind have access to computers with speech output, Braille displays, or enlarged characters on conventional monitors. Always provide an alternative to visual meeting materials and presentations.
- In advance of a meeting, give specific details of the room location in relation to other areas within the hotel or building. Contact the hotel concierge or guest relations staff to meet and provide the person who is blind with a hotel tour, highlighting specific areas such as the front lobby, meeting rooms, elevators, closest restrooms, and sleeping room.
- When dining out, offer to read menus to persons who are blind. Concurrently, when food is served, or if you are serving a person who is blind, describe what is on the plate.
- To guide a person who is blind, offer your arm, rather than taking his or hers. Note obstacles in your path such as a door jam or sidewalk curb.

### Presentation Issues

- To assist people with visual impairments, presenters should provide a verbal description of visuals, including overheads, slides, and charts. This does not mean screens must be read verbatim; messages conveyed by each image can be easily woven into the verbal narration. To the fullest extent possible, text should be displayed in large and bold letters.
- Remember that during open discussion periods at meetings, people who are blind may not know the way from their seat to the floor microphone. And, without



some verbal clues, they may not know when they've been recognized to speak. Verbally recognizing each speaker in turn not only helps people who are blind know if they have been recognized to speak, but also allows them to know when another person has finished speaking and not just paused for a second.

- The presenter should be advised by staff of any alternative format requirements for presentation materials and how to obtain them.

## **Members Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing**

- Members who are deaf or hard of hearing may use a variety of means for communicating. For this reason, it is important to have the members specify their needs; don't assume they will require an interpreter. If a member requires sign language interpretation services, verify their preferred style of communication and secure an adequate number of interpreters for the meeting. American Sign Language (ASL) is most commonly used, although many modes of communication exist (Signed English/Signing Exact English, Pidgin Signed English/Contact Sign, Cued Speech, etc.).
- Remember to always speak to the person and not the interpreter as you would in any language translation setting.
- Ensure that the member's hotel room is equipped with a flashing light alarm clock, door knocker, and other such provisions.
- When dining out or attending other social events, interpreters should be scheduled accordingly, unless directed otherwise.

### **Presentation Issues**

- Ensure that the presentation area is well lighted so that sign language interpreters can be seen easily, even if other lights are turned off for parts of a presentation.
- Allow for preferred seating, usually in front of the speaker and interpreter.

- Encourage the use of captioned versions of films, slide shows, and videos.
- Consider using CART (computer-aided transcription services), real-time captioning that may be an appropriate option for large meetings.
- Use "communication cops," people who monitor meetings and ensure that only one person speaks at a time.

## **Members With Mobility Impairments**

- Request specific hotel room accommodations, such as a roll-in bathroom shower, two beds (particularly if the member is accompanied by an attendant), and close proximity to the elevators. Ensure that these details are conveyed to the hotel and follow up if necessary.
- Ensure, in advance, that specific routes, restrooms, meeting rooms, and restaurants are available and accessible.
- Ensure there is adequate space for a wheelchair or scooter in meeting rooms and at conference and banquet tables.

### **Presentation Issues**

- Ensure that the stage is accessible for wheelchair users giving presentations. Also make sure the microphone, laptop, and other presentation tools are within reach.
- Be sure that the physical layout of the meeting area is accessible. Don't block walkways or doorways with items such as coat racks, ashtray bins, garbage receptacles, or signage.

## **WEB AND ELECTRONIC MATERIAL ACCESSIBILITY**

- <http://www.cew.wisc.edu/accessibility/>
- <http://www.w3.org/WAI/>
- <http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/1194.22.htm>
- <http://www.section508.gov/docs/PDFGuidanceforgovernment.pdf>
- <http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm>

## **Persons Who Are Deaf**

Benefit from captioning or text for any Web communications in audio or video

## **Persons Who Are Blind**

- Need online text to be compatible with a screen reader; PDF files are accessible to blind users only if the following conditions are met:
  1. The PDF file has the proper tags
  2. The PDF file has images and graphics with alternative text
  3. The visitor has Adobe Acrobat 5.0 or greater
  4. The visitor has either a Jaws or Window eyes screen reader or has Adobe Acrobat 7's read-aloud feature.
- Should have all pictures, templates, banners, and other non-text elements of a Web page accompanied by alt-tags or alternative text

## **Persons Who Have Low-Vision**

- Benefit from text that has a white/pale colored background with darker writing
- Require many documents in large text; some Web sites have an option to adjust text size and font

## **Persons With Motor Control Issues/Difficulty Using a Mouse**

Need to have a keyboard to make the site navigable

## **Persons With Learning Disabilities**

- Need text to be as clear and readable as possible and information organized so it is easily navigable





## RESOURCES

### **ADA Information Center**

1-800-949-4232  
www.adata.org

The ADA Information Center (for the Mid-Atlantic Region) is one of 10 regional centers established to provide training, information, and technical assistance on the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) to businesses, consumers, and state and local governments. Funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, under the U.S. Department of Education, each center has a toll-free hotline staffed by specialists who can answer specific questions about the ADA.

### **American Foundation for the Blind— General Information Center**

<http://www.afb.org>

In addition to general information about the foundation, this site provides guidelines about Web page accessibility and information about assistive technology products, including product reviews by users.

### **Disability Issues Office of the American Psychological Association**

202-336-6038 (Voice)  
202/336-5662 (TTY)  
akhubchandani@apa.org

### **Enhancing Your Interactions With People With Disabilities**

<http://www.apa.org/pi/disability/enhancehome.html>

Khubchandani, A. M. (1999). *Enhancing your interactions with people with disabilities*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

### **Disability Glossary**

Khubchandani, A. M. (2001). *Disability glossary*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

### **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**

1-800-526-7234  
<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/>

Anyone may call JAN for information. Calls are answered by consultants who understand the functional limitations associated with disabilities and who have access to up-to-date information about accommodation methods, devices, and strategies.

### **National Association of the Deaf**

<http://www.nad.org>

Programs and activities of NAD include certification of American Sign Language professionals, certification of sign language interpreters, deafness-related information and publications, and legal assistance.

### **National Federation of the Blind**

<http://www.nfb.org>

The NFB serves as an information and referral service for persons who are blind, providing information on scholarships, literature, and publications about blindness; aids, appliances, and other adaptive equipment for persons who are blind; and advocacy services. The Web site provides links to computer resources, low-vision and research resource lists, and the International Braille Technology Center. The site also offers guidelines for Web page accessibility.

### **National Relay Service**

1-800-855-2880 (TTY)  
1-800-855-2881 (Voice)  
<http://www.att.com/gen/general?pid=11212>

### **Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, Inc.**

<http://www.rid.org/>

RID administers the National Testing System that certifies interpreters and provides support services and contact information for interpreters.

### **Sign Language Associates, Inc.**

301-946-9710 (Voice/TTY)  
[www.signlanguage.com](http://www.signlanguage.com)

As the most successful private interpreting service provider in the country, SLA provides interpreter services 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. It boasts a staff of 48 professional interpreters and over 200 qualified part-time interpreters.

### **United Spinal Association**

<http://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>

This free resource guide provides practical tips for disability etiquette.

