

Accessibility Toolkit

Southern Delaware Intergroup Accessibilities Committee

Introduction	1
Meeting the Challenge	1
Addressing Needs	2
What Accessibility Means and What You Can Do to Help	3
Southern Delaware Intergroup Accessibilities Committee	3
Catalog of A.A. Accessibility Material	3
Meeting Place Accommodations	4
Carrying the Message to A.A.s with Physical Disabilities and/or Chronic Illnesses	5
Carrying the Message to the Deaf or Hard of Hearing	6
Sign Language Interpreters	7
Blind or Visually Impaired	8
Easy to Read Literature	8
Accessibilities Checklist for Meetings and Groups	10
Introduction	10
Parking	10
Route of Travel	10
Entrance	10
Inside the Building	10
Restrooms	11
The Meeting Room	11
Helpful Resources Related to Accessibilities	12
Pamphlets/Fliers	12
Workbook	12
A.A. Guidelines	12
Service Material	12
Publications	12
Catalog/Order Forms:	12
Illustrated, Easy-to-Read Pamphlets	12
Disclaimer	13

Introduction

The purpose of the Accessibilities Committee is to help make A.A. accessible to every member who desires it—to help alcoholics with various needs to either get them to meetings, or have meetings brought to them. This includes, but is not limited to, those who are blind/visually impaired, hearing impaired, confined to their homes for health reasons, and/or physically incapable of getting to meetings on their own.



The guiding principle of this committee is that there are no special A.A. members, only members with different needs. They are A.A. members who wish to have the same privileges and responsibilities as all A.A. members with regard to the activities we all consider necessary for our continuous sobriety. These include regularly attending meetings and special A.A. functions; speaking at meetings; and participating in 12 Step work, sponsorship, and service on both the local and area levels.

Meeting the Challenge

A.A. members in regions around the country have formed committees addressing how best to enable A.A. members with various needs to reach and participate in A.A. meetings, or to arrange to have A.A. meetings brought to them. These committees work with local A.A. groups to make their meetings available to all who want to attend.

Carrying the message to all those who want it can be a challenge — one A.A. members have always been willing to accept — with the goal of including all alcoholics in the wonderful experience of belonging to a group and partaking in the full range of benefits of A.A. membership. Some A.A. entities are attempting to meet this goal by forming Accessibilities Committees and there are currently some 200 such committees throughout the U.S. and Canada A.A. service structure.

This Toolkit was created in an effort for districts and groups to discuss and inventory the various needs in the communities you serve. We hope this toolkit would help assess where your District/Group is and what steps need to be taken to help better carry the message to all needs populations who can benefit from it.

Addressing Needs

A.A.'s General Services Office has accessibility materials collected from the experience from several General Service Conference areas, central offices, intergroup offices, and districts where Accessibility Committees have been formed in the United States. This service material is available to the Fellowship for those who wish this shared experience.

While there are no “special” A.A. members, there are many members who have specific needs. This would include alcoholics who may be:

- Deaf or hard of hearing
- Use a wheelchair, walker, or cane
- Blind or have low vision
- Live in nursing home
- Limited in reading and writing skills
- Live in rural areas/isolated, home or hospital bound
- Single parents that are unable to find suitable child care to attend meetings
- Physical disabilities or chronic illnesses



Whatever their disability or particular challenge to receiving the A.A. message may be, we hope that they would never be excluded from A.A. meetings, Twelve Step work, or A.A. service work.

Respect for the dignity of others is the foundation for all our efforts to carry the message to alcoholics with specific needs, with emphasis on identification rather than on how we are different. As one deaf A.A. put it, “I’m just an alcoholic, like everyone else here. I have the same need to be a ‘worker among workers’ and not be singled out for special treatment. If you can just make the program available to me, I’ll do what I have to do to work it.”

The goal is to include all alcoholics in the wonderful experience of belonging to a group and partaking in a full range of benefits of membership. Beyond helping those in your own group or committee, others may be informed about carrying the message to alcoholics with specific needs through workshops and presentations at A.A. gatherings, such as area assemblies, conventions, conferences, round-ups and Regional Forums.

Our Big Book says, “We are people who normally would not mix,” and this is especially true when someone is a little “different” from the others. But the rewards of giving this kind of service to a fellow alcoholic are immense! Group unity grows stronger, the person with unique needs is included and respected as a fully-participating member of the group, and everyone’s sobriety is strengthened.

What Accessibility Means and What You Can Do to Help

The need for access is not just about wheelchair bound people, but also about people with other disabilities such as physically disabled, deaf and hearing impaired, blind and visually impaired, learning and reading impaired, seniors and homebound. Others include those with language barriers and single parents requiring childcare.

How we serve these people is to provide interpreters for meetings and events, as well as Braille A.A. literature, audio material, programs for specific needs, and rides in special cases. We encourage wheelchair accessible meetings/events and big book tape study meetings in each district. The list goes on: assist the physically disabled at events; encourage groups to provide childcare; update accessibility information in meeting directories (and online); bring meetings into homes, hospital or long-term care facilities; encourage districts and groups to support meetings in care facilities; provide literature and workshops on accessibility; explore other needs; and work with GSO and other districts and areas.

Southern Delaware Intergroup Accessibilities Committee

The SDI Accessibilities Committee is autonomous. Although we follow the guidance set forth by GSO, the focus of our committee can vary depending on needs identified.

The SDI Accessibilities Committee performs two broad functions:

- Provide guidance to the districts and groups within Southern Delaware Intergroup to ensure each group's message is accessible
- Provide services that benefit members across groups and districts

An example of guidance includes recommending that groups conduct an accessibility survey, such as the one included at the end of this toolkit, to determine whether the groups are doing everything possible to make their meetings accessible to all members.

An example of a project is the initiative to open lines of communication with nursing homes and homeless shelters across the areas we serve to determine ways that we can bring the A.A. message to those who need it within those facilities.

Catalog of A.A. Accessibility Material

A catalog of A.A. material lists a wide range of literature and audio-visual material for alcoholics with various needs. For the blind and visually impaired there is recovery literature in Braille and large print, as well as audio tapes. Alcoholics Anonymous and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are available in American Sign Language (ASL) on VHS videos for the deaf and hard of hearing. You can go to the A.A. website and download a catalog or order online: <http://www.aa.org/>.

Meeting Place Accommodations

Tips for making Meetings Disability Friendly (Accessible)

- Always unlock the wheelchair entrance door(s) when unlocking the main entrance.
- Keep wheelchair ramps and/or entrances clear of any obstacles which may hinder access.
- Space chairs and tables with adequate room for individuals with mobility devices to maneuver around the meeting area freely (without assistance).
- Place coffee pots back from the end of tables in a position where a cup will slide under the spout and rest on the table.
- For larger venues, have a microphone/amplifier available for chair persons, speakers & readers (seldom is a non-amplified voice loud enough for an individual who has a hearing problem).
- Be open to the possibility of having a certified sign interpreter for an individual who is hearing impaired.
- Try to set up the meeting the same way each week (e.g., arrange seating, speaker podium, coffee pots, in the same place each meeting). If you move and reorganize things, it's only hiding whatever has been moved to a blind or vision impaired individual.
- Freely offer rides to and from meetings when possible (reasons are obvious). 9. Don't interfere if an individual with a disability is doing a task for his or her self (even if it may look awkward to you. It is OK to ask if he or she needs help, rather than just jump in and take over.



Carrying the Message to A.A.s with Physical Disabilities and/or Chronic Illnesses

Many A.A. members are hard of hearing or deaf, visually impaired or blind, brain injured, confined to their beds with a chronic illness, or use wheelchairs, walkers or crutches. Members of a group may feel stymied when first faced with these out of the ordinary requirements but, in fact, there are many accommodations which can be made so that alcoholics with unique needs can be active, participating members of a “regular” group. Some adjustments are simple and some are more complicated—but all are possible for the member willing to “go to any lengths” for his or her own sobriety and to help another alcoholic.



Often A.A.s will take a meeting to an A.A. member who is home or housebound. “I can’t tell you,” one hospitalized A.A. reported, “what a difference it made in my mental and emotional state when those six people showed up in my room carrying the message of A.A. and all the love and support of our Fellowship. And they did it twice a week for three months, until I was able to make meetings again! I was so down in the dumps before; I really had sort of given up—and, to be honest, I had started thinking I might as well have a drink, since I was dying anyway. But hearing the experience, strength and hope of others in the program inspired me to fight both my illnesses—the cancer and my alcoholism. I don’t know what I would have done without A.A. at that low point in my life.”

For members who aren’t confined to bed, A.A.s in their group often drive them to and from meetings, install wheelchair ramps over steps to the meeting room, and arrange the room so that there is ample space for wheelchairs or walkers. It is important to identify meetings accessible for wheelchair users in local meeting schedules.

Services and material available for members who are chronically ill and/or have limited ambulatory ability include the Loners/Internationalist Meeting (LIM), a newsletter for A.A. members who are in isolated areas, at sea, or home- or hospital bound (known as Homers) and stay in touch with other members by mail and newsletters. A similar publication (not through G.S.O.) is World Hello, an international correspondence group. Many A.A.s share via computer bulletin boards and on-line meetings. You may contact

the On-line Intergroup of A.A. (intergroup-approval@worldstd.com) for further information. Alcoholics Anonymous, and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are also available on CDs that run in Microsoft Windows. G.S.O. has a service piece, "Tapes for Sale and Exchange," that lists distributors of taped A.A. talks, and the A.A. Grapevine has a series of popular audiocassettes on A.A. subjects.

Carrying the Message to the Deaf or Hard of Hearing



For members who are deaf or hard of hearing, the use of a skilled interpreter in American Sign Language (ASL) is encouraged. The Accessibilities Committee can compile and maintain a list of online meetings where ASL interpreters are available, and, if needed, identify a list ASL interpreters who are willing and able to sign at A.A. functions. The cost of ASL interpreters is a factor for many groups. If your district or group requires the use of an ASL interpreter, contact the SDI

Accessibilities Committee for help in coordinating efforts to make signed meetings available.

Some intergroup/central offices have TTY (Teletypewriter or Text Telephone) machines to enable the deaf member to readily contact the A.A. community. Those who do not have them use the Telecommunications Relay Service, which is offered in most communities. Either way, there should be some training in the use of this equipment so that the communication will be as smooth as possible for all concerned. They might also keep a list of deaf or hard of hearing A.A. members who have TTY machines and would like to network with members; the SDI Accessibilities Committee can assist in finding such resources.

If a deaf member comes to your group, it is helpful, when speaking, to look directly at the deaf or hard of hearing member, since many are able to read lips. As needed, the SDI Accessibilities Committee can assist in efforts to start new A.A. groups or meetings that are more accessible to deaf or hard of hearing members.

Services and material available for the deaf and hearing impaired include the Intergroup/Central Offices Directory (those with TTY equipment are noted); and a 5 volume 1/2" VHS video of Alcoholics Anonymous in ASL. Pamphlets rewritten for the deaf or hearing-impaired alcoholic include "A Deaf Newcomer Asks," "A Brief Guide to Alcoholics Anonymous" "Translation of the Twelve Steps," "Translation of the Twelve Traditions," and "Is A.A. For You?" Deaf members are welcome to participate in the LIM. There is also an International Deaf Group by Mail listed under "Special International Contacts" in the regional directories published by G.S.O. For more detailed information see the A.A. Guidelines on Carrying the A.A. Message to the Deaf Alcoholic.

One A.A. member reminded us that, in carrying the message to the deaf alcoholic, "Try not to treat them as different or special, but allow them freedom to participate in a typical A.A. meeting.

“The main thing to remember is that deaf alcoholics have the same problem as anyone else. While we and they may come up with a thousand reasons why they are different, let’s emphasize over and over “Don’t drink; Keep coming back.”

For the purpose of these guidelines we will use the term “deaf.” There are other people who are hard of hearing, either permanently or temporarily. People who are deaf or hard of hearing are all unique, and there is a variety of ways to communicate with them: sign language, speechreading, writing, typing, and TTY, for example.

Often, sign language is the most effective way to communicate, and many groups use sign language interpreters to help carry the message to deaf members. In a pinch, you can try writing back and forth. But keep in mind that English is not the first language of many deaf people—sign language is! So, whenever possible, use sign language—either directly or through an interpreter. If you do have to write, keep it simple and brief. Encourage the newcomer to take A.A. literature and invite them to come to another meeting. A smile, a handshake and a cup of coffee speak “the language of the heart,” which we can all hear.

Sign Language Interpreters

As many groups have increased the availability of online meetings, options available for those who are hard of hearing have also increased. Applications such as Zoom include closed-captioning features, as do other tools used during meetings. However, in some cases, in both in-person and online meetings, there may be a need for a sign language interpreter.

If there is a need for sign language interpretation, try to arrange to have an interpreter at the meetings that deaf alcoholics attend. The deaf member may be able to bring an interpreter. If not, try to make arrangements through a local agency or check with your local Accessibilities Committee, intergroup or central office, general service district or area committee to see if they have any experience with the situation.

Qualified interpreters are professional people who charge fees for their services. Experience suggests that most groups will agree to have a non-A.A. attend its closed meetings to act as interpreter for the deaf alcoholic. Professional ASL (American Sign Language) interpreters adhere to a strict code of ethics, which assures the confidentiality of the A.A. meeting.

Some A.A. groups cover this expense. Sometimes an agency will take care of the expense. On occasion, local area committees, districts, and central/intergroup offices have authorized payment for interpreters. Professional interpreters who are also A.A. members sometimes are willing to volunteer their services. Occasionally advanced students of interpreting will do the job at no fee for the experience gained. Be careful of placing too much reliance on volunteers, as deaf members rely on these services and there should be stability in whether the meeting is interpreted or not.

Whatever arrangements are made should be based on a group conscience decision arrived at after full discussion at a business meeting. Is the group willing to cover the expense of this service, or does it wish to appoint someone to contact the central office

or a professional agency about providing an interpreter? In order to welcome the deaf person and the interpreter and make the newcomer feel that he or she is an important addition to the group, it is important that a full consensus on these points be reached in advance. The interpreters should be introduced to the group before meetings.

Initially it may be difficult to convey feelings through another person, so try to communicate as directly as possible. It is important to have the deaf person's attention before speaking. He or she may need a wave of the hand, a tap on the shoulder or some sort of signal that you wish to communicate. Many deaf people have some training or experience in speechreading (also known as lip-reading). However, this varies widely with individuals. Effective speechreading also requires very specific conditions: the speaker should not be chewing gum or eating, should not have an accent or a mustache, and there should be no backlighting. If a deaf person indicates that he or she can speechread, try to follow these guidelines. Also, speak slowly and clearly, but don't exaggerate. Look directly at the person while speaking. If you are called on to read something while an interpreter is signing, read slowly and clearly. Try to furnish the interpreter with the text beforehand, as formal writing is more difficult to interpret quickly.

Blind or Visually Impaired

For A.A. members who are blind or visually impaired, simply getting to a meeting room can be the biggest problem. The Accessibilities Committee can compile and maintain a list of sighted members who are willing to provide transportation to and from meetings and other A.A. functions. Several groups have asked their local central office or intergroup to code Twelfth Step lists to identify members who are willing to provide transportation. Volunteers may be



recruited to guide the blind or visually impaired newcomer to chairs, the hospitality table and rest rooms, until that member is acquainted with the surroundings. Meeting rooms should always be set up exactly the same way, or else the blind or visually impaired members should be alerted to what's different. Banging into a chair or a table in what was empty space at the prior meeting can be both dangerous and embarrassing.

Services and material available to help the blind or visually impaired alcoholic include books and pamphlets available in Braille, in large print, and/or on audiocassette tape, and a list of suppliers of A.A. talks for sale or exchange.

Easy to Read Literature

Some alcoholics are unable to take advantage of the wealth of supportive and informative literature in A.A. If you become aware that a member might have a limited ability to read, there are several ways to be helpful without embarrassing him or her.

For instance, when your group's literature chairperson announces which books and pamphlets are available at that meeting, he or she can also mention the numerous books, pamphlets and Grapevine articles which are available on audiotape. Or, if you think a member of your group might have limited reading skills, you can structure your Step and Traditions meetings so that the Step or Tradition is read aloud at the beginning of the meeting—which is great for everyone!

Accessibilities Checklist for Meetings and Groups

How accessible is your meeting? This is a guide to help reduce the physically-based access barriers that a person may encounter when attending meetings in your location.

Introduction

The meeting location should be physically accessible so that anyone may arrive on site, approach the building, and enter the meeting without barriers. Following are some questions your group can answer to determine the overall accessibility of your meeting space.

Parking

- Are an adequate number of accessible parking spaces available? (9 feet wide for car, plus 5-foot wide access aisle)
- Are spaces close to accessible entrances?
- Are spaces marked with identification signs?
- Is the parking area or street clear of snow, ice, or other debris?
- Is a path of travel by wheelchair accessible from the street or parking area?
- Are the sidewalks even and in good repair? Are there curb cut-outs to facilitate access to the sidewalk?

Route of Travel

- Is the meeting place accessible to public transportation?
- Is there a clear route of travel that does not require the use of stairs?
- Can any potential obstacles along pathways— including hanging objects— be detected by a person using a cane or other mobility device?
- If the meeting is at night, is the pathway well lit?

Entrance

- Does the entrance have steps, a threshold, or other physical barriers?
- If so, is there a ramp, lift, or an alternate entrance that is accessible?
 - Is the ramp excessively steep? Does it have railings?
 - Is the lift in good working order? If the lift is operated by a key, does someone on location have possession of the key or know where the key is kept?
 - Is there signage indicating the location of the alternate accessible entrance?
- Does the entrance door have adequate width (32") and clearance to accommodate a wheelchair?
- Can the doors be opened by someone in a wheelchair or would he or she need assistance?

Inside the Building

- Is there level access from the wheelchair accessible entrance to the meeting area?
- If not, are there ramps to enable someone in a wheelchair to reach the meeting? (Lifting someone over steps or stairs is not an acceptable solution for access.)
- If there is an elevator or lift, is it in good working order? If it is operated by a key, does someone on location have possession of the key or know where it is kept?
- Are corridors and door widths (32") adequate for passage of a wheelchair?
- Are corridors reasonably clear to allow safe passage for everyone?

Restrooms

- Is at least one fully accessible restroom available?
- Are the stall doors operable?
- Is there adequate space for a person in a wheelchair to maneuver within the stall?
- (44" for forward movement and a five-foot diameter or T-shape of clear space to make turns.)
- Are there grab bars on the walls behind and to the side nearest the toilet?
- Can the faucet be operated without grasping, twisting, or turning?

The Meeting Room

- Are chairs set up with adequate aisle space for a wheelchair?
- Is the lighting adequate?
- Is there a designated section for members who are Deaf or Hard-of-Hearing?
 - If so, is there adequate space for a sign language interpreter to sit with easy access to that group?
- Is someone available to welcome people and orient them to the meeting space as needed.
- Is the coffee service accessible to a person in a wheelchair or with another type of mobility device?
- Is A.A. literature available that addresses the needs of individuals with diverse abilities?
- Does the local intergroup/central office know that the meeting space is available to people with diverse accessibility needs?

Additional information about Accessibilities and setting up your meeting space may be available from your district or area Accessibilities Committee or your local intergroup/central office. You may also want to search the internet for a variety of Accessibilities Guides and information. In addition, the following accessibilities service materials are available on the A.A. website at www.aa.org.

1. A.A. Guidelines — Accessibility for All Alcoholics (MG-16)
2. A.A. Guidelines — Sharing the A.A. Message with the Alcoholic Who Is Deaf (MG-13)
3. Serving All Alcoholics (F-107)

Helpful Resources Related to Accessibilities

Click on Links below or go to Alcoholics Anonymous website <http://www.aa.org/>

Pamphlets/Fliers

[A.A. For the Older Alcoholic \(Large Print\)](#) (P-22)

[This is A.A. \(Large Print\)](#) (P-56)

[Frequently Asked Questions About A.A. \(Large Print\)](#) (P-57)

[Serving All Alcoholics](#) (F-107)

Workbook

[Accessibilities Workbook](#) (M-48I)

A.A. Guidelines

[Serving Alcoholics with Special Needs](#) (MG-16)

[Carrying the A.A. Message to the Deaf Alcoholic](#) (MG-13)

Service Material

Online Meetings* (SMF-124)

[Loners-Internationalists Meeting Information Sheet \(LIM\)](#) (SMF-123)

Publications

[Box 459: Sign of the Times \(Spring 2014\)](#) (F-36A)

[About A.A.: A.A. for the Alcoholic with Special Needs \(Spring 2014\)](#) (F-13C)

Catalog/Order Forms:

[Literature Catalog \(includes A.A.W.S. and A.A. Grapevine material\)](#) (F-10)

Illustrated, Easy-to-Read Pamphlets

[Is A.A. For Me?](#) (P-36)

[What Happened to Joe?](#) (P-38)

[It Happened to Alice!](#) (P-39)

[The Twelve Steps Illustrated](#) (P-55)

[Too Young?](#) (P-37)

Disclaimer

The materials presented in this toolkit are not endorsed nor approved by Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. The material is provided research of other Areas around the United States as part of its 12th Step work in reaching out to the alcoholic who still suffers. Some of the items in this toolkit were originally published by A.A. World Services, Inc., or the A.A. Grapevine, Inc., but do not assume that this implies continued approval by the General Service Conference for their use in these pages. Alcoholics Anonymous®, A.A.®, and The Big Book® are registered trademarks of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc. The Grapevine® and A.A. Grapevine® are registered trademarks of The A.A. Grapevine, Inc.