

SFRSC ADDITIONAL NEEDS HEARING IMPAIRED GUIDELINE

Disclaimer: Narcotics Anonymous does not enforce the law. This listing of the law, and the consequences for groups not complying with the law, are included so that your group can make a fully informed choice. This is in line with Chapter 4 in the Basic Text: “We believe that the sooner we face our problems within our society, in everyday living, just that much faster do we become acceptable, responsible and productive members of that society”. Additionally, Narcotics Anonymous supports the right of every addict to find recovery through Narcotics Anonymous. To assist Groups and the NA service Structure to fulfill Tradition 3 and Tradition 5 in reaching out to those with Additional Needs, the following guidelines are being provided. This guideline is only a general guidance on a complex set of issues. Groups and Service Entities may find that their situation may not be covered in these guidelines. In these cases, or at any time, it is highly encouraged to contact your Area, Region, SFRSC Public Relations Additional Needs Point of Contact (POC) or NAWS to obtain further assistance.

Statement of Purpose: The South Florida Regional Public Relations is committed to supporting the right of every addict to find recovery through Narcotics Anonymous. This guideline is to help groups, Areas Region and Conventions with suggestions on what to do when faced with accessibility issues about addicts with physical, visual and hearing disabilities. This guideline will address those with hearing disabilities at meetings.

Definitions of Hearing Impairment:

- 1) Deaf: Significant or profound hearing loss. The method of communication is primarily American Sign Language (ASL).
- 2) Hard of Hearing: Any degree of hearing loss without the use of ASL. Depending on the degree of hearing loss, the use of hearing aids, apps and special devices and lip reading may be used.

In both groups, the level of verbal or written English skills may vary widely.

How to assist a NA member with a hearing disability at a meeting:

It can be difficult to tell if a member has a hearing disability. Hopefully, the member will let someone know of any needs. If there is an initial difficulty in communicating, pen and paper, or cell texting, may be an option.

No matter what degree of hearing impairment, the following information will help:

- 1) Insure to maintain eye contact. When one looks away while speaking, or covers the mouth, it becomes difficult to read facial and body expressions and lips.

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- 2) Do not speak loudly or not at all. Speaking louder will rarely help (unless the member states that it will) and not speaking at all would be just as rude as not speaking to any other newcomer.
- 3) One person speaks at a time. It is very difficult to understand several people speaking. This is because the hearing-impaired member is also looking at facial and body expressions. Trying to watch several people at a time not only is challenging but causes a loss of communication.
- 4) Meeting chair arrangement and seating are also important. Chairs arranged in a circle, square or rectangle are optimal. When chairs are in a row, for example many speaker meetings, insure the hearing-impaired person has a seat up front with unrestricted view of the speaker.
- 5) Maintaining an atmosphere of recovery in the meeting also helps. Members need to keep in mind that when they continually get up and down from their seats, especially in front of the hearing-impaired member, that valuable communication is lost. Also, cross talk also interrupts communication, as well as the meeting.
- 6) Lighting: Lighting is important for the member to be able to read lips and see the speaker and interpreter. A special situation is candlelight meetings. If the meeting is a candlelight meeting, on the meeting schedule and candlelight stated in the format, there is no need to turn on the lights. There is always a place at the meeting where the member and the interpreter can be seated where it does not interfere with the candlelight format but offers the ability to the member to see the interpreter. Spirituality and common sense will help find a solution.
- 7) During the readings, offer the written literature for the member to read and follow along.

If the member states that the preferred method of communication is ASL, a certified Sign Language interpreter should be utilized.

Obtaining an interpreter can be done by contacting the state registry of certified interpreters or an interpreting agency. Certified interpreters are bound by a Code of Ethics and must adhere to HIPAA (the laws that govern medical release of information and confidentiality). Therefore, even in a closed meeting, anonymity will be kept.

Many groups will be concerned about cost. Here are some suggestions to help:

- 1) Friends or family members interpreting: there are some draw backs to this. If a family member is interpreting, the NA member may not be able to speak freely (this would be the same as having your mom in the room). Additionally, they might not understand NA terms and relay the information incorrectly. This would also apply to a friend who is not a NA member.

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- 2) A NA member that knows ASL: this can be a good option if the meeting does not overburden the NA member doing sign. Remember, that NA member also deserves meetings where she or he can concentrate on the meeting for themselves. When someone is interpreting, their focus is on their task and they may not get the life saving message of NA that they need for themselves.
- 3) Interpreters needing CEU (hours for certification) may be willing to interpret one regularly scheduled meeting a week for a very nominal fee.
- 4) If there are 2 neighboring Areas that have members needing an interpreter, those Areas can choose a meeting near their boundary and share the cost of the interpreter. Group member should ensure that the hearing impaired members have transportation to that meeting.
- 5) Court and treatment ordered members: In most states, Florida included, when a member requires an interpreter, the COURT or the TREATMENT CENTER must provide the interpreter. Remind the member that she or he has that right. If the member sticks and stays after court/treatment orders, THEN it will be the responsibility of the group to obtain the interpreter.
- 6) There is special equipment, both apps and instruments, that can assist in interpreting. Some members may have access to this, and others may not. It may be brought to the service system (Area, Region) if purchasing one-time equipment may be an option.
- 7) Another medium available is the virtual meeting Deaf Zoom group. This group meetings on Zoom on Thursday 8 pm EST and Saturday 12 noon EST. This is a closed group has both ASL and voice and welcomes any addict. This group is not to be used in place of physical meetings but is a welcome aid to recovery. The meeting is posted on NA.org and the direct link is: <https://zoom.us/j/802616925>
- 8) The website should have instructions for those that are hearing impaired to be able to use the phone lines. Phones lines that are able to receive texts will also help.

Please remember that members with Additional Needs are full NA members. Including them in business meetings, service work and activities allows them to feel a part of the group and NA, rather than apart from everyone.

Please feel free to contact the Regional Additional Needs POC at hareodog@mindspring.com or call at 321 567 4112 (landline) if there is any problems or additional information is needed.