

## SFRSC ADDITIONAL NEEDS BLIND AND VISION 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 Outreach Additional Needs Point of Contact (POC) or NAWS to obtain further assistance.

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

Definitions of Vision Impairment:

1. Blind: Significant, profound or total vision loss. Most with this vision loss will use either a white cane, a human guide or a service dog with a marked vest stating, “guide dog” and a long handle.
2. Vision Impairment: Any degree of vision loss that interferes with sight. This can include, but is not limited to, narrow field of vision, pinpoint vision, diminished sight in darkness or low light and episodes of loss of sight due to illness such as Multiple Sclerosis or injury.

In both groups, reading ability by sight is either affected or not an ability. Depending on the vision loss, the use of Braille, reading apps, MP3s, CDs and other technology or tools may be used.

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

It can be difficult to tell if a member has a vision disability unless there are obvious signs such as a white cane or guide dog. Hopefully, the member will let someone know of any needs. There may be some embarrassment of having a vision disability, especially with newcomers. Some signs that a member needs some assistance would be either walking through the door and stopping, as if confused, walking into objects or seeming to be lost in the room. Greet the member, with your name, and ask if you can be of assistance.

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

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1. Getting to meetings: members with vision challenges cannot drive. They are dependent on public transportation or members willing to transport them.
2. The meeting place: When members with vision challenges are attending, there are some situations to keep in mind for the safety and ability of the member to be as independent as possible.
  - A. Meeting places are memorized. This means the door entrance, room entrance, bathroom, furniture placement, the coffee pot area with ingredients and utensils, etc. are all memorized for ease of movement and self-sufficiency. When something is changed in the meeting room, please tell the member of the change upon entry. Otherwise, the member can become confused or lost within the room.
  - B. There are times that the member will need assistance. This could be to find a direction where something is located, who is in the room or a variety of other reasons. Here are some suggestions on how to assist:
    1. The member may call out someone's name or say something like "hey" to get a person's attention. The member is not being rude but just trying to find who is available to help! By responding with your name, the member then knows who is being addressed and communicate the need. Remember that sound is one of the ways a person with vision challenges can "see".
    2. If the member needs physical assistance to get to a particular place, do not grab them. Instead, step up to their side and ask how they prefer to be assisted. Many do appreciate the offer of an elbow on which they can place their hand.
    3. If there is no recognizable voice near them, or if it is a newcomer, there is the feeling of being alone and/or ignored. Please do walk up to the member and introduce yourself. This is also helpful as there could be voices talking to each other, but the member is unsure if you are in a private conversation or are busy.
    4. Sometimes the member may ask you to read a section of literature to them. Please remember our spiritual principles in helping the member – no NA member is a burden; all are equally important.
  - C. Business meetings: There are several challenges at business meetings:
    1. The assumption that disabled members are not capable of service work. Please include all members.
    2. The voting process is another situation. The business meeting leader needs to read the vote out loud stating those votes for, against and

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abstentions as well as whether the vote passed or failed. The member cannot see the show of hands.

3. When passing out flyers, please take a moment to read the flyer aloud.
- C. Websites: here are things to remember:
1. When creating a website, please remember to add handicapped accessible features. There are several apps from which to choose. If you are not sure which are the best ones, ask the member.
  2. When placing flyers on the website, and this is to include Facebook pages, please describe what is in the flyer. Many apps cannot “read” the pictures or the words in the flyer as they are not compatible with readers.
  3. In the U.S., Federal laws do apply to public websites. Website accessibility does fall under ADA law, Title III, to be handicapped accessible. If your group needs assistance, your Region has knowledgeable people to assist you.
- D. Phonelines: The phonelines should have verbal instructions for those with vision impairments. The members cannot read a meeting schedule and do depend on voice instructions.

Please remember that NA members with Additional Needs are equally able to participate at all levels of service. Including them in business meetings, service work and activities allow 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](mailto:hareodog@mindspring.com) or call at 321 567 4112 (landline) if there are any problems or additional information is needed.