

## **Serving Individuals with Disabilities**

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## Services and Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities

**Policy:** AVDA is committed to ensuring equal provision of services to survivors of domestic violence and their dependents, and any other family member or any other member of the residence who might be in danger or threatened by danger.

**Procedures:**

1. Domestic abuse survivors who require special care due to mental or physical disability shall be eligible and reasonable accommodations will be made including, but not limited to, permitting them to bring their caretaker with them.
2. Individuals requiring special accommodations may be assigned to the ADA compliant bedrooms or apartments on AVDA's residential campus.
3. Auxiliary Aids are available, as needed.
4. Residential Services Managers, Program Services Director, Business Operations Director, or Facility Operations Manager should be notified regarding any changes needed to the facility for participants requiring special accommodations as soon as staff is made aware of the need.
5. If a participant needs additional service providers to facilitate services at the residential campus, explain the Authorization for Release of Information form and ask the Participant to sign so that the service provider can access the residential campus.
  - a. Visitors shall sign a confidentiality agreement form upon arrival to the residential campus and sign-in the Visitor/Vendor Log.

## Services and Accommodations for Persons with Visual Impairments

**Policy:** AVDA shall provide appropriate support and auxiliary aids to persons with visual impairments.

**Procedures:**

1. Advocate will meet with the participant with a visual impairment and determine if a representative from *The Lighthouse for the Blind* should come to the shelter to assist them with learning the facility layout, grounds, emergency procedures, and evacuation routes.
2. All printed resources provided by FCADV for persons with visual impairments are stored with the auxiliary aids kit at shelter. These should be utilized for Shelter, Transitional Housing, or Outreach participants, as needed.
3. Advocate will contact *The Lighthouse for the Blind* for any other necessary resources, braille or taped.
4. Staff and participant will sign release of information forms when staff is advocating for the participant and if visitors from *The Lighthouse for the Blind* come to the residential campus or outreach offices.
  - a. Visitors will need to sign a confidentiality agreement form upon arrival to the center.
  - b. Visitors will sign-in the Visitor/Vendor Log if the service site is the residential campus.
5. Advocate will refer residents who have eye injuries to local ophthalmologists for medical care.

## Serving Individuals with Service and Emotional Support Animals

**Policy:** AVDA shall make all necessary accommodations for participants with Service and Emotional Support Animals.

### **Procedures for Accommodating Service and Support Animals**

AVDA has policies and procedures in place to ensure accordance with Title III of the American Disabilities Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Fair Housing Amendment Act regarding the admittance of service animals that perform tasks for an individual with a physical or mental disability and emotional support animals. Each law has a slightly varied focus, but all embrace the same principle: ensuring that people with disabilities have equal access to services in domestic violence centers. In order to adhere to federal laws and to practice good advocacy it is best to believe survivors when they inform you that the animal is a service or emotional support animal.

The purpose of the following procedures is to provide guidelines for staff to follow when program participants with a disability with a service or support animal seek and receive services from AVDA.

### **A. Shelter and Transitional Housing:**

#### **a. Service Animals**

- i. A service animal is a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability. (Beginning on March 15, 2011, only dogs are recognized as service animals under titles II and III of the ADA.)
- ii. All eligible individuals seeking shelter services asking for accommodations for their service dog shall be allowed into shelter or transitional housing without asking any qualifying questions.
- iii. Inform an on-call supervisor when a service animal accompanies an individual seeking shelter or transitional housing services.
- iv. Under the ADA, nonprofit organizations that serve the public generally must allow service animals to accompany people with disabilities in all areas of the facility where the public is normally allowed to go.
- v. Staff should thoughtfully consider room placement for the individual and the dog. Things to consider include (but are not limited to):
  1. Space/Size of room
  2. Allergies of possible roommates
    - a. Allergies and fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people using service animals. When a person who is allergic to dog dander and a person who uses a service animal must spend time in the same room or facility, they both should be accommodated by assigning them, if possible, to different locations or different rooms in the facility.

3. Comfort level of possible roommates with animals
  4. Other accommodation needs of the individual with the service animal
- vi. When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, only limited inquiries are allowed.
1. Staff may ask two questions: (1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability, and (2) what work or task has the dog been trained to perform.
    - a. Staff cannot ask about the person's disability, require medical documentation, require a special identification card or training documentation for the dog, or ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.

**a. Emotional Support Animals**

- i. Initial questions for all eligible individuals seeking shelter services asking for accommodations for their support animal shall be asked the following questions: (1) is this a support animal, and (2) how does this animal help you.
  1. Staff cannot ask about the person's disability, require medical documentation, require a special identification card or training documentation for the animal, or ask that the animal demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.
- ii. If the individual seeking center services answers yes to question #1 (see above) and is able to provide information regarding question #2 (see above) then the support animal is accepted into shelter with the eligible person.
- iii. Center staff should thoughtfully consider room placement for individual and support animal. Things to consider include (but are not limited to):
  1. Space/Size of room
  2. Allergies of possible roommates
    - a. Allergies and fear of dogs are not valid reasons for denying access or refusing service to people using service animals. When a person who is allergic to dog dander and a person who uses a service animal must spend time in the same room or facility, they both should be accommodated by assigning them, if possible, to different locations or different rooms in the facility.
  3. Comfort level of possible roommates with animals
  4. Other accommodation needs of the individual with the service animal

**B. Outreach:**

**a. Service Animals**

- i. A service animal is a dog that is individually trained to do work or perform tasks for a person with a disability. (Beginning on March 15, 2011, only dogs are recognized as service animals under titles II and III of the ADA.)
- ii. All eligible individuals seeking outreach services asking for accommodations for their service dog shall be allowed access to all outreach services without asking any qualifying questions.

- iii. Inform an on-call supervisor when a service animal will be accompanying an individual seeking outreach services.
- iv. When it is not obvious what service an animal provides, only limited inquiries are allowed.
  - 1. Staff may ask two questions: (1) is the dog a service animal required because of a disability, and (2) what work or task has the dog been trained to perform.
    - a. Staff cannot ask about the person's disability, require medical documentation, require a special identification card or training documentation for the dog, or ask that the dog demonstrate its ability to perform the work or task.
- b. **Emotional Support Animals (all animals besides dogs)** Outreach services are not required by law to accommodate any animals besides dogs.
  - i. **Service or Emotional Support Animals in Common Areas**
    - 1. A service or emotional support animal who is working must be able to accompany the survivor with a disability. This means the service animal must be allowed to accompany the survivor to all areas of the center such as bathroom, kitchen, sleeping area, and group room.
    - 2. This does not imply that the service animal can run around the center unattended. When the service animal is working, it must be under the supervision of the survivor with the disability. Supervision of a service animal may be done with a harness, leash, or vocal commands.
    - 3. When the service animal is not working, staff may request that the animal be kept in the survivor's room, in a kennel or a crate.
    - 4. In outreach, a service animal that is working must be able to accompany the survivor with a disability in all service areas such as group rooms, counseling rooms, offices, court, and other meeting places.

### C. Miniature Horses

- a. In addition to the provisions about service dogs, the U.S. Department of Justice's revised ADA regulations have a new, separate provision about miniature horses that have been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for people with disabilities. (Miniature horses generally range in height from 24 inches to 34 inches measured to the shoulders and generally weigh between 70 and 100 pounds.)
- b. Entities covered by the ADA must permit miniature horses where reasonable.
- c. The regulations set out four assessment factors to assist entities in determining whether miniature horses can be accommodated in their facility.
  - i. Is the miniature horse is housebroken?
  - ii. Is under the owner's control?
  - iii. Can the facility accommodate the miniature horse's type, size, and weight?
  - iv. Does the miniature horse's presence compromise legitimate safety requirements necessary for safe operation of the facility?

- d. Notify an on-call supervisor when a participant discloses a miniature horse as the type of service animal to accompany the individual seeking services.

#### **D. Care, Cleaning, Feeding of Service and Emotional Support Animals**

- a. It is the responsibility of the participant to clean up after the animal, care for the animal, and feed the animal.
  - i. Contact supervisor or management on call to advise and get support if the survivor is unable to perform the tasks of cleaning and walking the service animal as needed.
    - 1. There may be different reasons for this including the limitation of the disability of the survivor or that the survivor did not receive the proper training due to the abuser being in control of the service animal.
    - 2. Determine if there are local resources in the community that would be able to provide the proper teaching for the survivor to care for the service animal properly.
- b. Service and support animals should be kept reasonably clean and it is the responsibility of the animal's owner to maintain its hygiene.
- c. Service and support animals should be housebroken and the survivor should clean up any animal defecation.
  - i. Regarding the cleanup of animal defecation, plastic bags can be used to pick feces, and they can be tied and thrown in the designate garbage cans (not in kitchens, counseling rooms or other common areas)
- d. It is the responsibility of the center to inform the survivor where designated areas are to walk dogs or other animals
- e. Dogs (or other animals) that have fleas can create an ongoing problem for centers. If possible an animal that is infested with fleas should be treated before coming inside the shelter. If this is not accomplished, there are commercial products available that can help deal with this problem.

#### **E. Removal of Service Animal**

- a. Your supervisor or management on call must be contacted before a participant is asked to remove their service or emotional support animal.
- b. Supervisor or management on call discusses issue with staff to see if the situation meets criteria for removal.
- c. FCADV recommends that a manager may ask an individual with a disability to remove a service animal from the premises if:
  - i. Consistent with the provision of the Fair Housing Act, a housing provider may exclude an assistance animal from a housing complex when the animal's behavior poses a direct threat and its owner does not take effective action to control the animal's behavior so that the threat is mitigated or eliminated.
  - ii. The animal is out of control and the animal's handler does not take effective action to control it; or
  - iii. The animal is not housebroken.

1. If a public accommodation properly excludes a service animal under § 36.302(c) (2), AVDA shall give the individual with a disability the opportunity to obtain goods, services, and accommodations without having the service animal on the premises.

## In-Person Communication Etiquette

### Interacting with Individuals with Speech Impairments

Be tolerant and sensitive to persons with speech impairment. Please use the following guidelines:

- Give the person your undivided attention.
- If you have trouble understanding someone's speech, ask him or her to repeat what he or she has said. It is better for the person to know you do not understand than to assume that you do.
- Do not simplify your own speech or raise your voice. Speak in a normal tone.
- Write notes back and forth or use a computer, if feasible.
- Ask for help in communicating. If the person uses a communicating device, such as a manual or electronic communication board, ask the person how to use it.

### Interacting with People with Disabilities

As with all people, persons with physical disabilities have specific needs. Please use the following guidelines when communicating with a person with mobility or physical impairment:

- Do not make assumptions about what the person can or cannot do. Always ask if the person would like assistance before you help. Your help may not be needed or wanted.
- Do not touch a person's wheelchair or grab the arm of a person walking without first asking if he or she would like assistance.
- Do not hang or lean on a person's wheelchair because it is part of the wheelchair user's personal space.
- Never move someone's crutches, walker, cane, or other mobility aid without permission.
- When speaking to a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, try to find a seat for yourself so the two are at eye level.
- Speak directly to the person in a wheelchair, not to someone nearby as if the wheelchair user did not exist.
- Do not demean or patronize the wheelchair user by patting him/her on the head.
- Do not discourage children from asking questions about the wheelchair. Open communication helps overcome fearful or misleading attitudes.
- When a wheelchair user —transfers out of the wheelchair to a chair, toilet, car or bed, do not move the wheelchair out of reach.
- Do not raise your voice or shout. Use normal speech. It is Ok to use expressions like —running along . It is likely that the wheelchair user expresses things the same way.
- Be aware of the wheelchair user's capabilities. Some users can walk with aid and use wheelchairs because they can conserve energy and move about quickly.
- Do not classify persons who use wheelchairs as sick. Wheelchairs are used for a variety of non-contagious disabilities.

- Do not assume that using a wheelchair is in itself a tragedy. It is a means of transportation/freedom that allows the user to move about independently.

### **Interacting with People who are Visually Impaired**

Persons with visual impairments have specific needs. Please use the following guidelines when communicating with persons who are blind or have a visual impairment:

- The first thing to do when you meet a blind person is to identify yourself.
- When speaking, face the person directly. Speak in a normal tone. Your voice will let the person know where you are.
- Do not leave without saying that you are leaving.
- Some individuals who want assistance will tell you. You may offer assistance if it seems needed, but if your offer is declined, do not insist.
- When offering assistance, say, “Would you like to take my arm?” and allow the person to decline or accept. The movement of your arm will let the person know what to expect. Never grab or pull the person.
- When going through a doorway, let the person know whether the door opens in or out and to the right or left.
- Before going up or down stairs, let the person know that you are going up or down, and advise if there is a handrail and where it is. Ask the person if he or she would like assistance – he or she would let you know.
- When giving directions, or describing where things are in a room or in the person’s path, be as specific as possible, and use clock clues where appropriate.
- When directing the person to a chair, let the person know where the back of the chair is, and he or she will take it from there.
- If the person has a service animal, do not distract or divert the animal’s attention. Do not pet or speak to the animal unless the owner has given you permission.
- The person’s single greatest communication need is to have access to visual information by having information either read or provided in an accessible format (Braille, audio).

### **Interacting with People with Dual Sensory Impairments**

The means of communication with a person with dual sensory impairments will depend on the degree of hearing and vision loss. Use all of the suggestions in the above sections on hard of hearing and visual impairments. The person with dual sensory impairments has unique and very challenging communications needs. Staff is to use every possible means of communication available.

# **Americans with Disabilities Act Checklist for Readily Achievable Barrier Removal**

AVDA's Self-Evaluation  
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