

# GRSCNA 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, the Georgia Region, Georgia Regional Public Relations and/or its Needs Point of Contact (POC) or NAWS to obtain further assistance.

Statement of Purpose: The Georgia 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 Georgia Regional Public Relations at <mailto:pr@grscna.com> call at 1-888-947-7262 if there are any problems or additional information is needed.

## GRSCNA 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, the Georgia Region, Georgia Regional Additional Needs Point of Contact (POC) or NAWS to obtain further assistance.

Statement of Purpose: The Georgia 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 and Region 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 lifesaving 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, Georgia 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 are virtual meetings that are sign language interpreted. This group is not to be used in place of physical meetings but is a welcome aid to recovery.
8. 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 Georgia Regional Additional Needs POC if there are any problems or additional information is needed.

## GRSCNA GUIDELINES FOR SITUATIONS WITH SERVICE DOGS AND HANDLERS IN NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS MEETINGS

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This additional information is being supplied to aid groups.

First, who should ask if the dog is a service dog? It is highly suggested that only trusted servants use these guidelines to inquire, and insure, that a dog coming into a NA meeting is a service dog and that the dog is potty trained and displaying quiet, obedient behavior that is conducive to an atmosphere of recovery. Trusted servants would be the equivalent of a store employee, as in cases involving ADA law, as ADA law does pertain to NA groups. So, greeters, room openers, GSR, etc., are all group trusted servants.

The most important thing to remember is that it is the HANDLER that has the access rights of having a service dog that accompanies them, not the dog. The dog has NO rights.

It is best if the handler is met outside the door to the room by the trusted servant. If it is not obvious what the dog’s task is (for example mobility, guide dog, etc), the trusted servant can then ask the following 2 questions (word for word is best so that there is no mistakes):

- 1) Is the dog a service animal required because of a disability?
- 2) What work or task has the dog been trained to perform?

If the handler replies “no” to the first question, then the dog is a pet and, according to the group and building/landlord/rental policies, can be excluded from the meeting. The handler is free to come back into the meeting without the dog/pet.

If the handler replies “yes”, then ask the 2<sup>nd</sup> question. The handler should reply with tasks the dog does, such as “brings my medicine, counterbalance, sees for me, hears for me, diabetic or

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medical alert, etc". If the handler states the dog is for "comfort" or "anxiety" and gives comfort, that is an Emotional Support Animal (ESA) and not a service dog. ESAs are NOT covered by ADA nor Florida State law for public access and therefore are considered pets. Again, emphasize the dog cannot be admitted to the meeting and the handler is free to come back into the meeting without the dog/pet. Remember that certifications/registrations are not any proof of the dog being a service dog. Only answering the trained tasks the dog does to mitigate the disability.

How to respond to other answers:

1) HIPAA says I do not have to answer: We are only asking what trained task the dog does to mitigate the disability. We are NOT asking their medical diagnosis. By both Federal and Georgia State laws, the handler is required to answer the question. However, if the handler still chooses not to answer, the dog can be denied access.

2) Who are you to ask me? This is why it is highly suggested it is a trusted servant that does the asking. Trusted servants do have the right, given to them by the group, to represent them. Therefore, the handler does have to answer the trusted servant. Please do not have any group member ask. First, they may not know the right things to say and cause a situation that could turn into a legal situation. Second, they do not have the group's elected representation and therefore cannot represent the group.

3) I have a doctor's letter and my dog has a right to be here! It seems that some folks bringing animals have doctor letters claim that gives the animal the right to be there, the animal is registered/certified etc.

There are 2 types of doctor prescriptions. 1) is for an Emotional Support Animal. 2) is for a service dog. The first is prescribing a pet to alleviate a mental health condition. It does NOT certify/register or in any way state that the doctor said that THAT particular animal is an ESA. Just that the Patient can have one. The doctor does not approve of any particular animal. The second prescribes a Service Dog to mitigate a major life system illness or injury. Even that letter does NOT certify/register or in any way approve of that particular dog. So, doctors' letters only prescribe an ESA or Service Dog can be used by the Patient. It does not cover the dog or animal whatsoever. ESAs are pets - they cannot go to non-pet friendly places. Service Dogs are medically task trained dogs that assist with a major life system illness/injury.

Again, the handler may still choose not to answer the question. Inform the handler that, by not answering, the dog can be excluded from the group meeting place.



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If it is determined the dog is not a service dog, do remember to tell the handler that they are welcome without the dog.

What if the handler has already entered the building? Attempt to ask the handler to please come outside to discuss a “matter”. Then follow the steps given above.

What if the handler does not want to step outside? Get another trusted servant (or any group member if no trusted servant is available) and calmly, quietly and privately as possible ask the questions and follow the steps.

If the person is inside the building and the dog is determined not to be a service dog: Advise the person that, in accordance with group policy and the rental lease, no pets are allowed in the building. They will need to remove the dog and feel free to return to the meeting.

What if the person refuses to remove the dog: First, attempt to have the person understand that bringing a pet into a no pet building can jeopardized the ability of the group to continue to meet there. Emphasize that the lease/rental agreement specifically states “no pets”. If the person still will not remove the dog, 2 spiritual considerations can be done:

- 1) For that meeting only, have a few members go outside and hold a meeting for the handler. At the end of the meeting, restate that the dog no longer can come into the meeting building.

- 2) The whole group goes outside until the handler leaves (no more than a 5 minute wait). If the handler still refuses to remove the dog, police may need to be contacted to escort the person out.

What if the dog is determined to be a service dog and later growls, bites, barks or causes other disruptive behavior during the meeting or while in the building:

If the handler does not take immediate corrective action, a trusted servant, on the spot, can ask the handler to please take the dog outside and settle the dog. Then the handler may return with the dog. If the handler chooses not to correct or settle the dog, the dog can be excused for the rest of that meeting only. Again, if the dog has been determined to be a SD, the handler will be allowed to return to the next meeting with the dog. DO take video of the dog’s misbehaving (remember, the dog, not the people in the room) as proof. If the dog does the same bad behaviors each meeting, please contact your Region Additional Needs POC immediately for further guidance. Please remember that, if the dog has been determined to be a SD, it could be the dog just has a bad day. Addicts should well understand that!

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If the handler needs to discuss this further with the Additional Needs Subcommittee, either call 404-882-9132 or email [adneedspec@grscna.com](mailto:adneedspec@grscna.com). You will get guidance on how to proceed.

Two additional points to remember: A NA meeting is considered a “business” by ADA Federal law. Therefore, we should abide by the law as much as possible. And, a church is exempt from ADA law. So, insure the church is ok with having a SD in the building. The majority of churches nowadays have no problem but will ask you to ensure that the dog behaves and is potty trained. If the church declines service dogs, contact Additional Needs for further guidance.

Last but not least: A NA meeting should insure that the atmosphere of recovery is present. A misbehaving dog does interrupt that atmosphere. At the same time, any situation that occurs in a NA meeting should be met with spiritual principles in mind. Many times, a spiritual solution will resolve a situation prior to it becoming a legal one.