JAccess | Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta

Disability 101 Guide

In this guide, you can understand the fundamentals of disability inclusion and how to remove barriers.

What is disability: Disability impacts over 1 billion people worldwide and 1 in 4 adults in the U.S. It is part of life and human diversity & something many people experience as they age.

What is disability inclusion: JAccess has written a definition of inclusion. True inclusion means creating communities where everyone is genuinely welcomed, respected, and valued as a meaningful contributor. It requires actively identifying and removing physical, social, and attitudinal barriers so that all individuals can fully participate and experience a true sense of belonging.

How can we remove barriers: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects people with physical or mental conditions that limit major life activities. But real inclusion goes beyond laws & takes effort and understanding. The ADA has five main parts, called titles:

- Title I: Employment
- Title II: State and Local Government Services
- Title III: Businesses Open to the Public
- Title IV: Telecommunications
- Title V: Other Important Requirements

Passed in 1990 after years of advocacy, the ADA is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against disabled people and ensures equal access to employment, government services, public spaces, and communication. While synagogues are exempt from the ADA, all places of

worship, Jewish organizations, camps, and nonprofits can still use the principles behind the law to foster inclusion and accessibility across Jewish communal life. To learn more about the ADA you can watch the video What is the ADA? Basics and Definitions of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Why it's important to remove barriers: Disabled people do not need to be fixed. Our community needs to support to remove barriers in programs, that can provide resources, access at events, and other opportunities, so people with disabilities can participate in Jewish life in Atlanta.

Who is protected by the ADA: A person is protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) if they meet any of these conditions: A person is protected when they have a physical or mental condition that seriously limits major life activities, had such a condition in the past, or are perceived by others as having such a condition.

What does "substantially limits" mean: A condition is considered a disability when it significantly limits major life activities under a broad and inclusive standard, though not every condition qualifies. For example, someone who has a mild pollen allergy usually does not.

What are "major life activities": These are everyday activities your body or mind does naturally. Examples include:

- Eating, sleeping, speaking, breathing
- Walking, standing, lifting, bending
- Thinking, concentrating
- Seeing, hearing
- Working, reading, learning, communicating
- Body functions like circulation, reproduction, and organ function

Examples of disabilities covered by the ADA: The ADA does not list every disability, but it covers many visible and invisible conditions, such as:

- Cancer

- Diabetes
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- HIV
- Autism
- Cerebral palsy
- Deafness or hearing loss
- Blindness or low vision
- Epilepsy
- Mobility disabilities (wheelchair, walker, cane)
- Intellectual disabilities
- Major depressive disorder
- Traumatic brain injury

This is not a complete list—the ADA covers many other conditions as well.
To learn more about the ADA you can explore Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act.

More info on diverse Types of Disabilities: Understanding the difference between apparent and non-apparent disabilities is important because not all disabilities are visible, and people's needs are not always obvious. Some disabilities can be seen right away, while others are hidden or not immediately noticeable, yet both can affect daily life in significant ways. This section explains how these two categories differ and why recognizing both is essential for creating an inclusive and supportive environment.

Understanding Apparent vs. Non-Apparent Disabilities
Apparent Disabilities: Apparent disabilities are visible or easy for others to notice. Someone does not need to disclose their disability for others. They don't owe their diagnosis to recognize that they may have a disability. Examples of apparent disabilities include:

- Using a wheelchair, walker, or cane
- Blindness or low vision

- Deafness or significant hearing loss
- Cerebral palsy
- Limb differences or mobility impairments

Because these disabilities are visible, people often make assumptions—sometimes correct, sometimes not—about what support a person needs.

Non-Apparent Disabilities: Non-apparent disabilities (sometimes called invisible disabilities) are not obvious to others. A person may look like they are not disabled, even though they experience significant limitations. Examples of non-apparent disabilities include:

- Diabetes
- Epilepsy
- Autism
- PTSD
- Traumatic brain injury
- Chronic pain
- Major depressive disorder
- ADHD
- Learning disabilities
- HIV

These disabilities can affect daily life just as much as visible ones, but because they are not obvious, people may misunderstand or question the person's needs.

Why the distinction matters: People with non-apparent disabilities may face doubt, and those with apparent disabilities may face assumptions, but the ADA protects both equally, recognizing that a disability does not need to be visible to be real or to qualify for accommodations.

Models of Disability: Understanding disability begins with understanding the diverse ways society views disability inclusion. Over time, several "models of disability" have shaped how communities view disability inclusion and these models' inclusive community inclusion planning such as synagogue accessibility, belonging at summer camp, to how we talk about

inclusion in Jewish life. Learning these frameworks helps us recognize harmful assumptions, embrace more empowering perspectives, and build communities where everyone can take part fully.

- **Social Model** (JAccess aligns with this): People aren't the problem, the barriers are. Inclusion means changing spaces, attitudes, and language.
- **Medical Model:** A disability is seen as something to "fix." Inclusion is delayed until the person changes.
- **Charity/Tragedy Model:** Focuses on pity. Treats disabled people as needing help, not as equals. Projects should avoid framing disability as "sad."

Terminology: Inclusion starts by removing barriers. When we shift our mindset, we build communities where everyone belongs. Other important fundamentals of Disability 101 topics include:

- **Ableism:** Happens when we assume everyone can do things the same way. For example, request accommodation for work.
- **Accessibility:** Is the practice of designing products, services, and environments so they can be used by everyone, for example, incorporating ramps, captions, and accessibility on a website or social media?
- **Accommodation:** Is a change that enables a person with a disability to access and take part in activities without altering their core purpose. Examples include large-print materials, extra time on tasks, event accessibility services, or desk placement at a job.

Further Learning:

I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much | Stella Young
Disability Belongs Resource Page
Open Future Learning
Ableism 101
What is Ableism?
Demystifying Disability What to Know and What to Say

Crip Camp Film
How the ADA Changed the Built World | Crip Camp | Netflix

Ready to turn awareness into action? Book a training with the JAccess Training Coordinator at lflax@jewishatlanta.org and learn how to create truly inclusive spaces where everyone belongs.