



Beyond LDs: invisible disability in religious school

creating a more inclusive &
accommodating learning community

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disability in our lives



- ▶ How have you experienced disability?
 - ▶ *Either for yourself, or in working with others*
- ▶ Among the people you know with disabilities, how many would be considered “invisible”?
- ▶ What do your schools/synagogues/organizations already do to accommodate disabilities?

disability defined

► **Americans with Disabilities Act (last amended 2010):**

(1) The term "disability" means, with respect to an individual

- (A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual;
- (B) a record of such an impairment; or
- (C) being regarded as having such an impairment (as described in paragraph (3)).

(2) Major Life Activities

(A) In general: For purposes of paragraph (1), major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working.

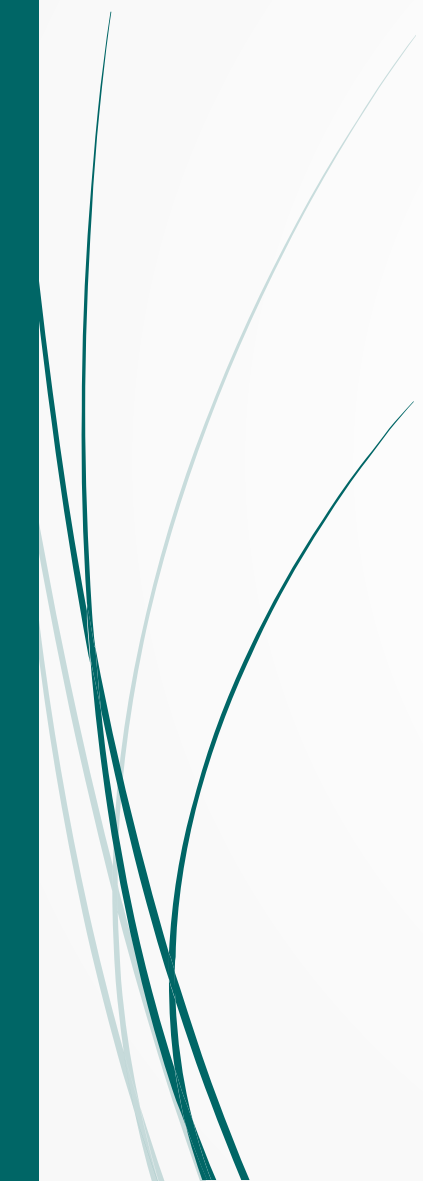
(B) Major bodily functions: For purposes of paragraph (1), a major life activity also includes the operation of a major bodily function, including but not limited to, functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine, and reproductive functions.

(3) Regarded as having such an impairment

For purposes of paragraph (1)(C): (A) An individual meets the requirement of "being regarded as having such an impairment" if the individual establishes that he or she has been subjected to an action prohibited under this chapter because of an actual or perceived physical or mental impairment whether or not the impairment limits or is perceived to limit a major life activity.

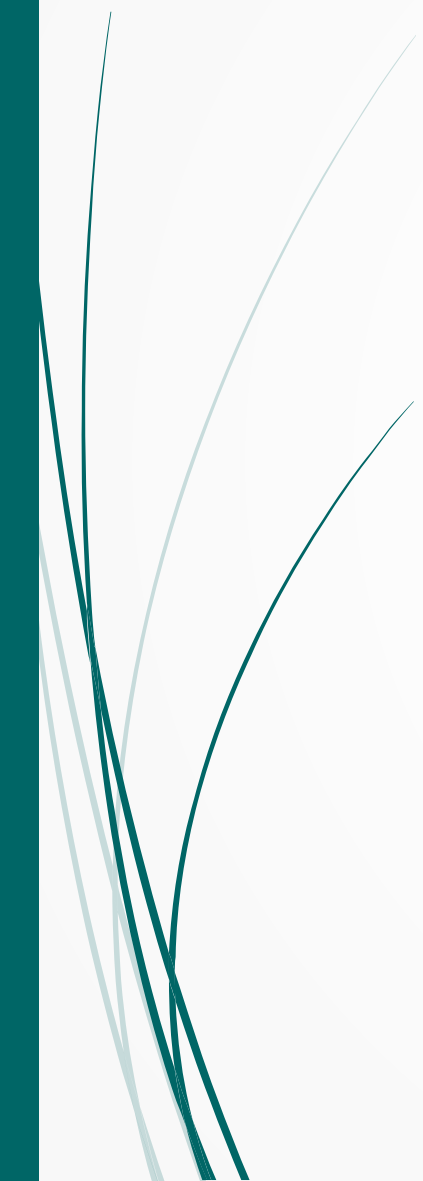


disability defined

- ▶ Is anything missing from the ADA definition?
 - ▶ Do you see any problematic or unclear language?
- 



(in)visible disabilities

- What makes a disability visible?
 - What makes a disability **in**visible?
 - How might a disability be both visible and invisible?
 - What can we do to make invisible disabilities visible in our communities?
- 



some invisible disabilities

- ▶ There are **thousands** of conditions that can result in disability, whether visible or invisible
- ▶ A short list of the “more common” invisible disabilities to encounter:
 - ▶ GI: Crohn's/colitis, IBS/IBD, gastroparesis
 - ▶ Autoimmune: Multiple Sclerosis (MS), Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA), Hashimoto's, Cystic Fibrosis (CF), Mast Cell Activation Disorder (MCAD)
 - ▶ Regulation & Autonomic: Diabetes, POTS, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS), Hypoglycemia
 - ▶ Genetic & Connective Tissue: Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS), Cystic Fibrosis (CF), Joint Hypermobility Syndrome (JHS), Marfan's syndrome, Fibromyalgia
 - ▶ Neuropsych: Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), Epilepsy, Narcolepsy, Eating Disorders (EDs), OCD/BPD/DID/PTSD/CPTSD
- ▶ Any others you've encountered?



reasonable accommodations

Americans with Disabilities Act – Updated 2010

(9) Reasonable accommodation

The term "reasonable accommodation" may include

(A) making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities; and

(B) job restructuring, part-time or modified work schedules, reassignment to a vacant position, acquisition or modification of equipment or devices, appropriate adjustment or modifications of examinations, training materials or policies, the provision of qualified readers or interpreters, and other similar accommodations for individuals with disabilities.



reasonable accommodations

- ▶ What sort of accommodations does the ADA definition of “reasonable accommodation” cover?
- ▶ What sort of accommodations are **not** covered or implied by the ADA definition?
- ▶ What can we do to go beyond the legally-mandated minimum and create an actively inclusive community in our schools?



“coming out”

- ▶ Disclosing one's disability status has similar psychosocial-emotional effects as coming out as LGBT
 - ▶ Not a perfect parallel – but there are many similarities
- ▶ You never know how someone will react – and people can really surprise you, both pleasantly and unpleasantly.
- ▶ There are appropriate and inappropriate reasons and approaches for asking for disability disclosure.
- ▶ *How can we start creating an organizational culture of safety so “coming out” as disabled is a positive experience for our students & colleagues?*



hiring notes



- ▶ It is **illegal** to ask for disability disclosure **before** hiring an employee.
 - ▶ If an interviewee offers disability information voluntarily, it becomes much harder to filter that information out in the hiring decision – try to consider it an act of bravery and how that sort of bravery could benefit your organization.
- ▶ Once an employee has been hired, **then** you may (and should) ask about any disability accommodations they may require to perform their job successfully.

school accommodations

Low-Hanging Fruit

- Registration/Enrollment Form Language
- Classroom & Staff Policies

Intermediate Steps

- Awareness-Raising
- Schedule & Space Considerations

Advanced Accommodation

- Infrastructure & Programmatic Structure
- Active Outreach (student & staff)



Low-Hanging Fruit

- Registration/Enrollment Form Language
- Classroom & Staff Policies

Registration/Enrollment Forms

- **Do** ask parents to disclose any physical, learning, or psychosocial disabilities their child has – but don't be offended if they're not comfortable sharing at first.
- Parents will be more likely to disclose if the enrollment form language...
 - Favors **value-neutral terms** over words that are inherently or colloquially loaded
 - *Disability, Obstacle, or Challenge > Problem or Issue*
 - *Information or Diagnoses > Labels or Conditions*
 - **Explains** why/how the information will be used – don't assume parents will know!
 - *So our teachers can plan activities that are most likely to inspire your child*
 - *To help us provide proper accommodation for our diverse student body*
- Keep in mind that many disabled youth haven't yet had access to the resources for a proper or official diagnosis.
 - *Some schools ask for two sets of information: "formal diagnoses" & "suspected obstacles to learning"*
- **Never make ANY promises or suggestions on your enrollment form you cannot keep!**



Low-Hanging Fruit

- Registration/Enrollment Form Language
- Classroom & Staff Policies

Classroom & Staff Policies

- It can take a little as one staff meeting to review your...
 - Student attendance & tardiness policies
 - *Penalties & policies that preclude make-up work will affect disabled students' ability to learn and develop a sense of belonging in class, especially after long hospital stays.*
 - Bathroom break/hall pass policies
 - *Crohn's and other GI conditions can necessitate frequent bathroom visits and, often, embarrassment – don't make it harder on these kids than it already is!*
 - Sub plan/teacher absence policies
 - *It is fair & reasonable to ask disabled teachers for a backup lesson plan to be kept on file in the event of a last-minute absence, even if you don't require such of non-disabled teachers.*
 - Vaccination record policies
 - *Whatever your state's laws regarding vaccine-avoidant "personal belief" exemptions, you are legally permitted to protect your immune-compromised teachers and students by having a stricter "no vax/no class" policy than the state. If a student or teacher has a **medical** vaccine exemption, however, that **must** be honored: they are the exact folks that herd immunity is necessary to protect!*

...for areas with room for improvement in providing a fair work and learning environment for all members of the community.



Low-Hanging
Fruit

- Registration/Enrollment Form Language
- Classroom & Staff Policies

**What other
simple accommodations
can we make for our
students & staff with
invisible disabilities?**



Intermediate Steps

- Awareness-Raising
- Schedule & Space Considerations

Awareness Raising

- Professional Development programs & speakers for teachers
 - *Don't hesitate to ask your own disabled staff to contribute: their experiences can be instrumental in creating a culture of all-ability acceptance!*
 - *But also don't be surprised if disabled staff don't want to speak or lead a program: they may not feel comfortable being "out" as disabled to everyone yet.*
 - *Just to emphasize: **never "out" a disabled staff member or student to anyone else without their express permission.** You can raise awareness of the challenges around disability accommodation without "outing" any individual who isn't ready.*
- Speakers, programs, and field trips for students
- Poster/sign campaigns
- PBL: Have upper-grade students plan their own awareness campaign and carry it out – maybe they'll even find the need for a project to make the school's space more disability-friendly!



Intermediate Steps

- Awareness-Raising
- Schedule & Space Considerations

Schedule & Space Considerations

- Classrooms
 - *Chair/resting space for teachers in a space where they can continue teaching*
 - *Desks/tables in a U shape: teacher can walk/wheel around to the most students with the least energy expenditure*
 - *Space options for students who need a minor break from overstimulation without going too far from supervision*
- Office
 - *Set aside a safe recovery space from major overstimulation*
 - *Keep carb-heavy snacks and drinks (with electrolytes, or Gatorade powder for making some) on hand for students or teachers whose blood sugar or blood pressure tend to crash*
 - *Comfortable place to lie down in the event of medical flare-ups which can hit without warning*
- Bathrooms
 - *Make sure an adult can get in to a locked bathroom or stall in the event of an emergency without breaking the lock/door (which could also injure the person stuck inside)*
- Scheduling
 - *Recess/free time: at least 5 minutes per hour of classtime*
- **Make transition times explicit in any schedule issued to either teachers or students!**



Intermediate
Steps

- Awareness-Raising
- Schedule & Space Considerations

**What other
intermediate
accommodations
can we make for our
students & staff with
invisible disabilities?**



Advanced
Accommodation

- Infrastructure & Programmatic Structure
- Active Outreach (student & staff)

Infrastructure & Programmatic Structure

- ▶ Food
 - ▶ Can participants with GI/autoimmune conditions/allergies find out full ingredient information for every food item?
 - ▶ Are there any options free of the Top-Eight allergens (*milk, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat, soy*)?
 - ▶ If outside food is brought in, how will you communicate the need for clear ingredient labels without folks feeling pressured to give up all of Grandma's Secret Recipe?
 - ▶ Would a participant in the program who can't eat any of the food still find it worthwhile?
- ▶ Space
 - ▶ Is there clear signage so someone new to the building can find the nearest restroom or water fountain easily? Nearest First Aid kit? Nearest AED?
 - ▶ Can people who can't take stairs transition between spaces with the whole class, or must they use an elevator while everyone else goes another way? (Especially for teachers on wheels, supervision during transitions can be tricky!)
- ▶ Programming
 - ▶ Are there program options with lower stimulation (small groups, no sound system, etc.)?
- ▶ What programs could address the specific needs & interests of disabled community members?



Advanced Accommodation

- Infrastructure & Programmatic Structure
- Active Outreach (student & staff)

Active Outreach

- ▶ In/visible disabilities can result in highly favorable traits in a teacher: perseverance, understanding, patience, self-awareness, and introspection.
 - ▶ *Note: Not always. Disabled people can have a wide variety of adjustment processes and reactions to their dis/ability. Disabled people don't exist to inspire non-disabled people and are allowed to be bitter/angry/etc. Disability doesn't inherently make a person a great/inspiring teacher, but it also doesn't have to prevent it.*
- ▶ Looking to fill a new position?
 - ▶ *Most disabled folks have a social or support network around them, either online or offline – and many are explicitly looking for part-time work that allows us time for all our weekday doctor appointments, making supplementary schools a particularly good fit for both the disabled staff member and the school administration. Ask one disabled acquaintance and they might be able to connect you to half a dozen more talented folks, some of whom may have otherwise given up on a job search!*
- ▶ Same goes for families with disabled children: many parents probably belong to at least one Facebook group for support and information around their child's needs.
- ▶ **Create a school that's a welcome community for one disabled student/staff member and you'll have the infrastructure underway to support their friends who are looking for a new community!**



Advanced
Accommodation

- Infrastructure & Programmatic Structure
- Active Outreach (student & staff)

**What other
advanced
accommodations
can we make for our
students & staff with
invisible disabilities?**



Resources



- ▶ Americans with Disabilities Act website:
<https://www.ada.gov/>
- ▶ Invisible Disabilities Association:
<https://invisibledisabilities.org/>
- ▶ More comprehensive list of Invisible Disabilities:
<http://www.disabled-world.com/disability/types/invisible/>
- ▶ In The News
 - ▶ <http://www.npr.org/2015/03/08/391517412/people-with-invisible-disabilities-fight-for-understanding>
 - ▶ <http://metro.co.uk/2016/06/21/invisible-disabilities-at-gigs-why-cant-i-use-the-disabled-loos-in-peace-5956806/>
 - ▶ <http://www.bustle.com/articles/114205-whats-an-invisible-disability-7-things-you-need-to-know>