

# JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

## Accommodation and Compliance Series

# Accommodation and Compliance Series: Speech- Language Impairment

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## Preface

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is funded by a grant from the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor. JAN makes documents available with the understanding that the information be used solely for educational purposes. The information is not intended to be legal or medical advice. If legal or medical advice is needed, appropriate legal or medical services should be contacted.

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## **JAN'S Accommodation and Compliance Series**

### **Introduction**

JAN's Accommodation and Compliance Series is designed to help employers determine effective accommodations and comply with Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Each publication in the series addresses a specific medical condition and provides information about the condition, ADA information, accommodation ideas, and resources for additional information.

The Accommodation and Compliance Series is a starting point in the accommodation process and may not address every situation. Accommodations should be made on a case by case basis, considering each employee's individual limitations and accommodation needs. Employers are encouraged to contact JAN to discuss specific situations in more detail.

For information on assistive technology and other accommodation ideas, visit JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <https://AskJAN.org/soar>.

### **Information about Speech-Language Impairment**

Limitations in speech and language may result from a number of different impairments and disorders. An individual may be limited due to problems with articulation, voice strength, language expression, or may be non-vocal. Following is a list of speech and language disorders including information from the American Speech-Language, Hearing Association (ASHA).

- Aphasia is impaired expression or comprehension of written or spoken language. Aphasia is often caused by stroke, brain injury or Alzheimer's dementia.
- Dysarthria results in difficulty pronouncing words like "cat" or sounds like "sh" and "ba." Dysarthria may be caused by a degenerative neurological disorder or alcohol intoxication.
- Dysphonias can be present in one of two forms, adductor or abductor. The adductor type produces a strained or strangled voice quality. Abductor sounds like chronic hoarseness or breathy and effortful speech.
- Esophageal speech is a technique whereby a person takes air in through the mouth, traps it in the throat, and then releases it. As the air is released, it makes the upper parts of the throat/esophagus vibrate and produces sound. This sound is still shaped into words with the lips, tongue, teeth, and other mouth parts.

- Stuttering results in repetition, blocks or inability to say certain words, and/or the prolonging of words. An individual who stutters may also have distorted movements and facial expressions when trying to speak.
- Nodules are most frequently caused by vocal abuse or misuse. Polyps may be caused by prolonged vocal abuse, but may also occur after a single, traumatic event to the vocal folds. Speech may be hoarse, breathy, and painful to produce.

Additionally, speech and language limitations might occur due to stroke, cerebral palsy, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Huntington's Disease, oral and laryngeal cancer, hearing impairment, traumatic brain injury, dementia, chronic laryngitis, and vocal cord paralysis.

## **Speech-Language Impairment and the Americans with Disabilities Act**

The ADA does not contain a definitive list of medical conditions that constitute disabilities. Instead, the ADA defines a person with a disability as someone who (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more "major life activities," (2) has a record of such an impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment. For more information about how to determine whether a person has a disability under the ADA, see [How to Determine Whether a Person Has a Disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act \(ADAAA\)](#).

### **Accommodating Employees with Speech-Language Impairment**

People with speech-language impairments may develop some of the limitations discussed below, but seldom develop all of them. Also, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all people who are aging will need accommodations to perform their jobs and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is only a sample of the possibilities available. Numerous other accommodation solutions may exist

#### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What limitations is the employee experiencing?
2. How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee's job performance?
3. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
4. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?

5. Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
6. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training?

### **Accommodation Ideas:**

#### **Limitations**

##### No Speech

- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Device
- Communicate Another Way
- Speech Generating Communication Devices with Telephone Access

##### Unintelligible Speech

- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Device
- Communicate Another Way
- Job Restructuring
- Speech Generating Communication Devices with Telephone Access

##### Weak Speech

- Flexible Schedule
- Job Restructuring
- Outgoing Voice Amplification - Telephone
- Voice Amplification

#### **Work-Related Functions**

##### Communicate

- Aide/Assistant/Attendant
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Device
- On-site Mentoring
- Outgoing Voice Amplification - Telephone
- Scribe/Notetaker
- Talking Telephones
- Voice Amplification

## Situations and Solutions:

The following situations and solutions are real-life examples of accommodations that were made by JAN customers. Because accommodations are made on a case-by-case basis, these examples may not be effective for every workplace but give you an idea about the types of accommodations that are possible.

**An accountant with spasmodic dysphonia needed time off periodically to travel out of state in order to get specialized medical treatment to manage his condition.**

He also experienced a breathy voice quality that limited his ability to speak loudly for several days after each treatment. The employer granted periodic leave and provided equipment to amplify his voice on the telephone as needed.

**A professor with stuttering experienced an exacerbation of his condition and needed to start attending speech therapy on a weekly basis to manage his symptoms.**

He asked that his course schedule be modified, so that he could change one of his courses to an online format, and have his other classes and office hours scheduled around his therapy sessions for the duration on the next semester. The employee modified the professor's teaching schedule.

**A receptionist who was recovering from vocal surgery had difficulty speaking loudly enough for customers to hear her when she greeted them.**

She also experienced vocal fatigue when speaking on the phone. Her employer purchased a voice amplifier for face to face use and one designed for telephone use as well, so that she did not have to strain her voice to speak more loudly.

**A volunteer reader in a library had a weak voice due to a previous infection that damaged her vocal cords. She**

She was given a voice amplifier so she would not have to strain her vocal cords trying to talk loud enough for the children to hear her.

**A university employee with cerebral palsy used a speech generating communication device to meet her communication needs at work and elsewhere.**

Her device worked well with her personal cellphone, but she needed a speakerphone in order to take calls on the office phone line. Due to workplace changes, she needed to start sharing an office with two coworkers. Her employer purchased an adapter for the device so that she could use her device with the telephone more discreetly.

**A scientist on the autism spectrum was able to speak at times but also experienced episodes when she found it difficult to speak and needed to use a speech device or speech generating app.**

She was preparing to present her research at a conference. She pre-recorded audio to go with her slides and brought a tablet with a speech generating app with her in case she needed it during the question and answer portion of her presentation.

## Products

There are numerous products that can be used to accommodate people with limitations. JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource at <https://AskJAN.org/soar> is designed to let users explore various accommodation options. Many product vendor lists are accessible through this system; however, JAN provides these lists and many more that are not available on the Web site upon request. Contact JAN directly if you have specific accommodation situations, are looking for products, need vendor information, or are seeking a referral.

## Resources

### **Job Accommodation Network**

West Virginia University  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080  
Toll Free: (800) 526-7234  
TTY: (304) 293-7186  
Fax: (304) 293-5407  
[jan@askjan.org](mailto:jan@askjan.org)  
<https://askjan.org>

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities.

### **Office of Disability Employment Policy**

200 Constitution Avenue,  
NW, Room S-1303  
Washington, DC 20210  
Toll Free: (866) 633-7365  
[odep@dol.gov](mailto:odep@dol.gov)  
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep>

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. ODEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.

### **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association**

2200 Research Blvd  
Rockville, MD 20850-3289  
Toll Free: (800) 638-8255  
Direct: (301) 296-5700  
Fax: (301) 296-8580  
<http://www.asha.org>

ASHA promotes the interests of, and provide the highest quality services for, professions in audiology, speech-language pathology, and speech and hearing science; and an advocate for people with communication disabilities.

**National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke**

P.O. Box 5801  
Bethesda, MD 20824  
Toll Free: (800) 352-9424  
Direct: (301) 496-5751  
<http://www.ninds.nih.gov>

The NINDS, an agency of the U.S. Federal Government and a component of the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Public Health Service, is a lead agency for the congressionally designated Decade of the Brain, and the leading supporter of biomedical research on disorders of the brain and nervous system.

**National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders**

31 Center Drive  
MSC 2320  
Bethesda, MD 20892  
Toll Free: (800) 241-1044  
[nidcdinfo@nidcd.nih.gov](mailto:nidcdinfo@nidcd.nih.gov)  
<http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

National Resource center for health information about hearing, balance, smell, taste, voice, speech, and language for health professionals, patients, industry, and the public.

**National Organization for Rare Disorders**

55 Kenosia Avenue  
Danbury, CT 06813-1968  
Toll Free: (800) 999-6673  
Direct: (203) 744-0100  
Fax: (203) 263-9938  
<http://www.rarediseases.org>

NORD is a unique federation of voluntary health organizations dedicated to helping people with rare "orphan" diseases and assisting the organizations that serve them. NORD is committed to the identification, treatment, and cure of rare disorders through programs of education, advocacy, research, and service.

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