# Ask JAN! Q&A: Sensory Team Edition

## [Introduction]

**TRACIE DeFREITAS:**

Welcome, everyone. We're pleased to have you join us for this Job Accommodation Network "Ask JAN! Q&A Webcast: Sensory Team Edition" I'm Tracie DeFreitas. I am a program leader and the Director of Training and Outreach at JAN.

Today I will be the moderator for this webcast, because I am joined by my JAN colleagues: Teresa Goddard, Lead Consultant for the JAN Sensory Team and Assistive Technology Services, and Jose Gonzalez Lopez, Consultant for both the JAN Sensory and Motor Teams. Thank you, Teresa and Jose, for joining us to talk about and respond to questions related to Sensory Team topics.

Now this JAN training is part of our "Ask JAN! Q&A" series and will include a high-level overview of common and trending Sensory Team-related job accommodation topics and a live Q&A. Sensory impairments such as deafness, hearing aid use, blindness and low vision, and immunological and respiratory conditions such as allergies and asthma will be discussed. The team will also discuss accommodation topics related to interpreting and captioning, digital accessibility technology, indoor air quality, and more.

The training will be 60 minutes in duration. Questions will be answered throughout the session. For additional information on these topics today you can always contact the JAN service directly for free consultation. So do visit AskJAN.org for more information. Now let's get started with the training.

Teresa, please take it away.

**TERESA GODDARD:**

Hi. Thanks, Tracie, for that great introduction. First I'd like to take you over a little bit of our agenda today. We're going to speak briefly about the Job Accommodation Network for those who may be new, and we will then do a brief overview of things that the Sensory Team handles while also taking your questions simultaneously. We'll do some discussion of typical topics that come up on the Sensory Team, some of the things that we commonly handle every day and continue our live Q&A with you while going over those topics. Toward the end, we're going to give you some information on typical referrals and resources that we might send you to if you were to contact us on the JAN Sensory Team, and then Tracie will wrap it up.

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## [JAN Overview]

Okay first the JAN overview.

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So if you didn't know, JAN has actually been around for quite a while. We were established in 1983 and are a national, free consulting service. We serve all 50 states in the US as well as the US territories, and occasionally we even get emails with questions from farther away than that. I think the furthest contact I've ever had was an email on assistive technology coming from India. We provide expert, trusted, confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and other disability employment issues. And this is provided as a service of the US Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy, otherwise known as OPEP. So thank you, happy 40th anniversary, JAN, and thank you for joining us as we celebrate 40 years of providing expert, trusted guidance to you, our consumers.

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## [What does JAN’s Sensory Team do?]

So what does JAN's Sensory Team do? Well, we do some things that you might expect and a few things you might not.

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Some of the typical topics covered on the JAN Sensory Team, things we answer questions about all the time, are the five senses, so it makes sense that we would have vision and hearing. We also take the occasional call on someone who is deafblind in the workplace. We do refer out a lot of questions on that, and I can talk more about that later. We take communication disorder questions, especially those related to speech, such as stuttering and articulation disorders. We also take questions on the respiratory system. I'm assuming this is because it has to do with the nose. Allergies and the immune system. Now it's not just respiratory allergies that we deal with. We also get questions on things like contact dermatitis, which is a skin condition listed on the next bullet point, and there are a lot of other skin conditions that are potentially coverable under the ADA as well that we do take questions on. So some typical conditions of that type would be things like psoriasis, eczema, hidradenitis suppurativa, also known as HS, and we also have historically taken some calls on diabetes, although the JAN motor team is dealing with some of those now. Jose, who is going to be talking a little bit after I wrap up my slides, does take a lot of those calls. So thank you, Jose, for doing that.

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## [Common Questions]

Next we want to get into some common sensory accommodation topics. So the Sensory Team covers quite a broad area, but there are some things that come in all the time, and we just want to give you an overview of some of those, and we also hope that you're going to start sending in your questions as Jose and I go over these topics.

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### [Hearing Aids & Phones]

So I'll tell you — what takes up more of my time than anything else on the Sensory Team are questions about hearing aids and phones and how can we make them work together? So I would say if you're in a situation and you have a question about your employee and how they're going to use the phone, if they have a hearing aid, the best thing that you can do to have good conversation with me is know something about the type of hearing aid they use and the features that it has, because that's going to help me understand what type of equipment I can suggest for you. If you don't know, your employee is a really good source of information on what type of hearing aid they're wearing in most cases. Try to get at least the name and the model number at a minimum. If I have those two pieces of information I can usually help you a lot.

These days, a lot of hearing aids are Bluetooth-compatible, and it's not unusual for someone to need some type of Bluetooth streaming device or another type of adapter, maybe two adapters working together, to connect to a workplace phone. In a lot of cases, people will have learned from their audiologist how to directly connect their hearing aid to something like an iPhone or Android phone or another type of cell phone, but they may not have gotten a lot of guidance on how to connect to landline phones or the type of VoIP phones we are seeing more and more in the workplace, so we typically get calls from people who say something like, you know, "They said it was no problem for them to use a phone, and we talked to them on the phone, but now they're in the workplace, and their headset doesn't work. We don't know what to do. We've tried five headsets, and none of them have worked. Where do we go from here?" So that's where JAN's experience and our willingness to brainstorm with you and troubleshoot really comes in. And again, if you're having these issues in the workplace and you have questions surrounding them, please put those questions in the question function.

**TRACIE:**

Teresa, we do have a question here around the hearing aid topic so I thought I would pop in here and interrupt you for a second. Let's see here. It says that my employee says they don't know what features their hearing aid has, they just know that the headset doesn't work. What should I do? Any suggestions?

**TERESA:**

You know, that's pretty common, Tracie, for the person to say, "I'm not sure what is not working, but it's not working. " You would hope that people get a lot of guidance from their audiologist on what the hearing aid can and can't do and that it comes with a lot of materials like a user guide that they can refer to, but sometimes in the moment we forget these things or maybe we didn't absorb them to begin with. Hopefully the person can at least tell you the model name and number or, like, the brand and the model number. If I had those two pieces of information, I can either explain to you how to go on the vendor's website, or if you're having problems I'm willing to go there myself and try to look up some info.

Now occasionally somebody will send me a serial number, and I'd like to ask you to avoid that, because if I call the vendor with the serial number, they will assume I have access to a lot of information that I don't have like the person's name and maybe even their address. So please remember: brand name, model number. If you can get those two things I can help a lot.

Some other names of features that you might hear besides Bluetooth are telecoil, also known as a "t-coil." You might also hear that the hearing aid has noise suppression features or features to help it function better in noisy environments. Those are things that are important for me to know too, if you happen to have that info. Here's why. If you have someone whose hearing aid doesn't really have Bluetooth but it has telecoil, they might benefit from what's called a "hearing aid-compatible" headset, A headset designed for use with that telecoil, T-E-L-E-C-O-I-L. And what that means is they need a headset that doesn't work like yours and mine where sound comes out of it, they need something that's going to connect with the telecoil feature in the hearing aid itself If you're thinking about buying one, make sure it's what you need before you order it, because a lot of times these things are nonreturnable. And that's my other big piece of advice for hearing aids. If you're going to make a purchase, find out what the return policy is, and make sure you are getting what you actually need.

So that's just a quick overview of hearing and phones. If we have other questions I'm happy to entertain them.

**TRACIE:**

Yes, we do, actually.

**TERESA:**

Fantastic! That's my favorite.

**TRACIE:**

Let me take a look here. Bear with me just a moment. There is a question here related to what's the best tech for remote workers with profound hearing impairment to use during Teams or Zoom meetings?

**TERESA:**

In an ideal world I'd like to see anyone who is an ASL user getting interpreter support during meetings, because there's really nothing quite the same as a professional interpreter assisting, but of course not everybody is an ASL user. You may occasionally have people with severe or profound hearing loss who don't use ASL. Could be because they grew up in another country and are fluent in another form of sign language, it could be that they have grown up here in the States and use something called Signed Exact English and may rely more on captions than the average person who uses sign, or they may not have learned sign language. We still get some cases where people are profoundly deaf and have never used sign language. That happens. So captioning could be an option. The automated captions within things like Teams and Zoom are getting better all the time, but I still think that CART practitioners do have an edge in that area. So a person who's not doing well with automated captions may benefit from CART services, but if they are a sign language user and that's what they asking for, I really think it's worth it to get one if you can. I hope that helps.

**TRACIE:**

Okay. Very good. I'll throw another one your way, then. We have somebody who has an employee who is a nurse practitioner in a hospital. They have overhead paging that's not accessible for her, because the communications are not relayed through any kind of visual display. Do you have any ideas for accommodation?

**TERESA:**

There used to be a really great option for accessible intercom, but unfortunately it's not available anymore. What really works best in this scenario is, if you can, find a system that, when something comes across the intercom, a person perhaps also get the notification on their phone or pager. That's the ideal. We have tried in the past here at JAN to identify options that will transcribe from an intercom, but most automated captioning options don't do it well. And even those that do, you have to be looking at your phone when it comes across to benefit from it.

So something like a buddy system or an alternate means of getting the person's attention, like letting them receive that via page or via a phone alert, could be more effective. There are some companies now also making badges that you can receive an alert on. So I think it pays to look around at all of your options, and you might wind up upgrading your system, but there's not a really great satisfying answer for that scenario. My best suggestion is if you are going through that, please call me here at JAN. Let's have an in-depth discussion about it, because sometimes it really helps to just talk about all of the options with someone who can brainstorm with you. And thanks for that great question.

**JOSE GONZALEZ LOPEZ:**

I agree with that. I've come across that question at least once or twice, and paging systems like old-school pagers still exist, and they can be integrated into those types of systems. It can also be very helpful in cases of not just intercom communication, but if there are other types of emergency situations, in larger areas like warehouses and hospitals for example, to get those communications out in case there is no other way that an employee would be able to get them.

**TERESA:**

Good point, Jose. And I will say this: Full-time interpreter services continue to be rare as an accommodation, but healthcare is one setting where I have seen people assigned an interpreter for all or part of every day, and sometimes having another person with you to provide hearing assistance or to provide interpreting could be very useful. When another solution hasn't been identified but the person is a sign language user, we've also seen that used initially while exploring other options. So that may be an unpopular opinion, but it is something that happens.

Any other questions on this topic, Tracie?

**TRACIE:**

I am going to throw one more your way, and then we will move to the next topic. As the questions come in we'll throw them out here, but this one is more related to hearing aids.

My client resides in New Jersey and at the time does not have insurance to cover the cost of hearing aids he desperately needs. Are there free or low-cost resources for individuals to get hearing aids? I thought I'd throw this one out here because we know how important a tool a hearing aid is for someone, and I know you have some feedback you can probably offer.

**TERESA:**

Oh yes. Absolutely. So when it comes to hearing aids there are resources that can help. If a person is a veteran, going to the Veterans Administration can be a good option. If a person is willing to seek services from vocational rehabilitation, they can often help as well. And we have also seen some cases where vocational rehabilitation assisted in finding funding for more complex needs like cochlear implants. And sometimes they can help to defray the cost of interpreters as well. So I would say vocational rehabilitation is a wonderful resource for anyone who is seeking accommodation or seeking to accommodate a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. There are other potential services as well. In some areas, civic clubs like for example the Lions Club may be able to help, but in some cases those clubs may be limited to helping minors, so someone in transition from school to work might be able to receive hearing aid funding from some civic clubs whereas adults may have a more difficult time accessing that. So adults may want to try other sources as well.

But the other point I would make is that there's often a way to accommodate a person even if they have no hearing aid or if their hearing aid isn't working well. There might be something you can do at the short term, in other words, until they get all of the technology that they are going to eventually need. So just keep that under your hat. And if you have those issues, please call in.

**TRACIE:**

All right. That's great. Thanks so much for the answers. I think we'll go ahead and move on to the next topic, and I'll keep sorting questions.

**TERESA:**

Sounds great. Thank you, Tracie.

So if we could see slide 11? Great.

### [Interpreters]

So slide 11 is about interpreters. I compiled this list of tips, because we were getting lots of questions from employers who hadn't had the pleasure of working with an interpreter previously and just wanted to make sure that they and their staff were prepared. So some tips that I would suggest are: First make sure you're choosing an effective interpreter, and choosing an interpreter who is certified can be a good way to do that or at least a place to start. RID.org is where we would typically refer people who are seeking to find certified interpreters in their area.

It's also helpful to prepare your setting. Make sure there's not a lot of background noise, and prepare the participants by providing materials in advance when you can. And talk about meeting etiquette and expectations. It may also make sense to consider notetaking assistance for the person who is receiving interpretation, because it can be difficult to take notes while also watching the interpreter. Some people do it really well. Some people feel more comfort if they know they are going to have some notetaking assistance.

Remember also from an etiquette standpoint you want to interact directly with the person who is deaf rather than posing your questions to the interpreter. Other than that, just relax, speak as you normally would, and here is one point I want to make: The interpreters do have a code of professional ethics that they must follow, so if they tell you they can't do something, don't push. Let's respect their professional judgment and ethics. Anything to add, Jose?

**JOSE:**

Not that I can think of. Just these are questions that do come up with employers that have not worked before with interpreters. So especially when interacting directly with an individual who is requesting the interpreter, making sure that you're still having the conversation with them as you would with any other person, I think it's something that is very important that people need to still consider.

**TERESA:**

I think other than choosing an effective interpreter and making sure you have an interpreter when needed, that might be the most important point. I'm from the hearing world, so I've never been in the position of having to have an ASL interpreter provide information to me and help me participate, but I've received linguistic interpreting on other languages, and it can be unnerving when people are talking to the interpreter, not to me. So just from personal experience I can tell you don't do that to people. Any other questions around interpreting?

**TRACIE:**

There is a question. What about impromptu meetings where you're not able to schedule an interpreter ahead of time? Any suggestions, strategies to handle that kind of situation?

**TERESA:**

Great question, and of course this comes up all the time. There are other communication supports that you can use. I would suggest that you use the interactive process before these types of impromptu meetings come up to try to figure out what works best for the person. So in other words there are lots of things like automated caption devices and apps for that, we can write back and forth, we can type back and forth on a computer. There are devices with lots of bells and whistles if we have a setting where people may benefit from that, but good old pen and paper or typing back and forth on a laptop can help as well. Some people like texting back and forth. If an employer doesn't want to allow texting but that's what helps the person, there are very secure apps that you can use as an alternative to texting that might suit your needs.

But the most important thing is to try to understand the needs of the individual who is seeking accommodation. Try to get a feel for what they think would work. Start from there. If you do want more information on additional communication supports, you can certainly contact us. We're happy to send you resources, and we also have some information on our site. But the one that I want to highlight is video remote interpreting. It is not something I would suggest using on an "all day, every day" basis, but there are companies that can provide you with pretty quick turnarounds on video remote interpreting, which means an interpreter who's available over a video feed. So that might be one of the better substitutes if you really can't have an in-person interpreter. Another one is to provide videophone equipment to the person and use video relay service for support during a telephone call. And a lot of times you can get services such as VRI and VRS together through the same vendor. So I would encourage you to take advantage of the links on our website — The tech team has just put one up — and get to know what your options are.

Anything to add, Jose?

**JOSE:**

Not a whole lot. Just when these situations do arise it is important to think about it beforehand, because unless someone has a full-time interpreter — and even in those cases the interpreter were to get sick or they can't provide one for that day for whatever reason, having backups preplanned and planning those during the interactive process is something that can really help stem that kind of panic that can really occur when you need an interpreter but you can't find one for that day because it was sudden or an interpreter couldn't be scheduled in some cases if an employer does have a specific vendor that they might have a contract with and they just can't get someone in. Looking at those other ideas that might, that can still work and still be effective but aren't necessarily as effective or as desired as the interpreter, but they can still help have that communication.

**TERESA:**

Learning a little basic sign language can go a long way to help in these type of situations, too. Not only to help everyone feel comfortable and included and welcome but also in situations where we don't have an interpreter at the moment. So I'd say your emergency kit for these types of situations would be if you have the option learn some basic sign. Keep things like pen and paper handy. And most of us have our phones with us these days, so if you're in a setting that allows phones, remember you may be able to text. And there are also some apps that can be very helpful for communication support.

So one example would be AVA. It's really designed to support a face-to-face conversation between someone who is deaf or hard of hearing and someone who is not. It does really well for situations where a person may be hard of hearing but could also be used in other scenarios as well.

And if you think this might come up a lot, you might talk to your employee to see if they are open to a device to support communication during these moments. So some examples would include the UbiDuo, which is now available with speech output. Actually designed by an individual who is deaf. Some people really like this device, some people don't. That's why I say talk to your employee. There are others as well that can provide good access to communication. Some of them can even give you a way to interface with video remote interpreters. So just remember there are a lot of options. Try to figure out what would support your person best, and we can provide you with a list of the range of options.

**TRACIE:**

I'm going to throw one other quick question out here, and then we're gonna move on just to keep things moving forward. Do interpreters have to be certified?

**TERESA:**

There is a certifying body. RID.org is the certifying body in the US. In some states there may be laws and regulations pertaining to certification and use of interpreters, in other words in some states you may be able to serve someone without a certified interpreter. In other states there may be a state or local law or regulation that's a barrier to that. So know your state and local laws is my advice. But there are cases where the most important thing is to have an effective interpreter. And it is technically possible to have someone who may be very effective but maybe is in the process of seeking certification or their certification has lapsed. Maybe someone who has grown up in the deaf community, is a child of deaf adults and is fluent, could that person be an effective interpreter? I think it depends on the person and the situation. Certification, though, is a good shortcut, if you will, to try to make sure we're getting someone who has completed some training and testing and also uses that RID.org code of ethics. But it's a controversial question.

**TRACIE:**

All right. Thank you, Teresa. We'll go ahead and move on.

**TERESA:**

Jose, would you like to pick it up? Thanks.

### [Low Vision & Computer Monitors]

**JOSE:**

So now from hearing we're going to vision. And some of the typical questions that we get are related to low vision and how people can use computers. So when working with this typically and in situations that I've handled, all of these really come as a package most of the time. So typically larger monitors so that people can adjust the system settings to be larger and be able to fit the size of text, icons, windows that they need to be able to see what's on the screen. And external screen magnifiers — Is it still something that's relatively popular, Teresa?

**TERESA:**

I'd say that a lot of people want to try external screen magnifiers and larger monitors as their first attempt, but it's almost never enough by itself.

**JOSE:**

And that's when we get to other — we're looking at more software solutions after that. So maybe looking at screen magnification software, which works essentially how the magnifier would work outside of the computer, but it just helps blow up what's on the computer screen to a size where someone that has low vision to be able to see it as well as screen reading software, where it doesn't necessarily make the text bigger, but it can just help read what is on the screen. And often these two can be combined so that someone can get the best use out of both of them. And often with that also comes the integration of speech recognition software so that if someone is having trouble being able to click on things on the computer or just have general use of the computer, they can simply speak the commands or dictate into a document what they're wanting to write.

**TERESA:**

Yeah, I would say, Jose, those combination programs like ZoomText Fusion, they can be really great. Some of them are very resource-heavy, so it's essential to make sure that a person's specs on their computer are adequate to run the software and also to run what other software they need for their work. Otherwise the computer system is going to slow to a crawl, and everyone's just going to be frustrated. And it makes sense too to know your options in terms of screen magnification. In other words what I mean by that is maybe you try one, and it is too resource-heavy for your current system. There are other options that you can try, but at some point you're going to have to decide how much computer this person actually needs to do their job and make it happen. We also are seeing issues with VPN users who have to use this type of software, whether screen reading, screen magnification, or a combo, and experiencing issues with that. So again, specs on the computer, super important. That's just my two cents.

**TRACIE:**

There is a question I would like to throw out there if you guys have a moment. Would it be considered reasonable to have to outfit several workstations with larger screens and magnifying software when the job class must rotate between 3 to 4 stations on a weekly basis?

**TERESA:**

You know, that's a great question. When it comes to the term "reasonable" and what's reasonable and what's not, the EEOC doesn’t give us a ton to go on. So for some employers that might be very reasonable and totally doable. The EEOC says "reasonable" means "reasonable on its face," i.e., ordinarily or in the run of cases, and it also uses the term "feasible." So for some employers, having three workstations outfitted might be no problem. For other workplaces use of one machine that's really up to spec and some type of docking station might make more sense. So I think it really depends on the situation.

**JOSE:**

And this is definitely starting to come up a bit more also in workplaces that there's no specific type of assigned seating or assigned computer use, where people can just come into the workspace and just work in whatever computer that's available. That's also something that's starting to come up I think a little bit more frequently with just how the work environment has changed. So it really — and that question really comes with "Can we just really dedicate this specific computer for someone to use? Because no one else has to use this specific type of computer." And that's a question that has come up as well.

**TERESA:**

Yeah, we saw a wave of these questions about 10 years ago, and now post-COVID they're back again. Everything that goes around comes around, I guess. How it's been solved historically has been either having some assigned workstations, or some employers have systems where you can sign up for — or we call it sometimes "leasing" the workstation that you want. And they can do long-term leases for people who have special equipment needs and so may need bigger monitor, different mouse, etc. We have also seen systems where people check out their assistive technology at the beginning of the shift and then check it back in to be locked away in a cabinet at the end of the shift. Can it work? Yeah. I think it puts an extra step in the day of the person with a disability. So while it's a potential solution, I think having the person's workstation preset is usually preferable when possible, but there might be people who want to do the hot desking and check out their equipment and take it wherever. So again, communication is key. Talk to your employee. What you think, Jose?

**JOSE:**

I definitely agree with that as well. That really communicating with your employee to figure out what would be the best solution in their specific situation is really one of if not the most important part of really this process as a whole.

**TERESA:**

Yeah, and that's true for any condition.

**TRACIE:**

All right. Great information from both of you. I'm going to throw one more question out here, but I'm going to keep moving forward with the slides. This is again related to vision. But we talk a lot about computers, using computers; right? But what about magnifiers for noncomputer roles? For example in production or manufacturing areas, are there ways to address those types of needs?

**TERESA:**

It kind of depends on what you're looking for. If we're talking about magnifying printed text or providing magnification for someone who has to work with small items or tools, yeah, there are great stand and hand magnifiers out there and even video magnifiers — sometimes we call them CCTVs — that can give you a wonderful, well-magnified view of something that's, say, on a table or a surface. So those options do exist. We have links for them on the website. We're happy to talk with you about them. If we're talking about workstations that have screens but aren't technically the type of computers you would see on a desk — so not a laptop, not a desktop, but does have a screen with some output — those continue to be an area of concern, because it can be very difficult to make those accessible. Are there external magnifiers that you can use with those? Yes. But is it ideal in every scenario? No. What you think, Jose?

**JOSE:**

I definitely agree with that. For other non-computer-related tasks there are magnifying options, but when it comes to those other types of computer contact services for screens that can't really be modified a whole lot, that is still something that can be a bit more complicated.

**TERESA:**

Yeah. I think a vision rehabilitation therapist could be very helpful in determining exactly what type of magnifier would benefit a person in this type of situation. I think the digital or video-based ones are great because they're adjustable. They're also more expensive. But if you're thinking of using an optical-type magnifier, then getting some assistance makes all kinds of sense. There are a lot of vendors for these things. One that carries a broad variety and has a good reputation for quality, just as an example, is Eschenbach. They do have staff members that can guide you. But getting some input from a professional, a vision rehabilitation therapist, perhaps a CATIS, can go a long way toward getting a successful accommodation in place. Oh, I see we have a service animal slide up. Jose, are you talking about service animals next?

**JOSE:**

Yes. I think just for the sake of time I'm going to go through the next couple of slides, and then we're going to take the questions on the questions slide if that's all right.

**TRACIE:**

Of course.

### [Service Animals]

**JOSE:**

So service animals is definitely one that I get questions about very often, because most places don't — most employers might have policies for employees regarding animals, but under title I it's very important to know that they should be reviewed like any other type of accommodations, and it's also important to consider service and emotional support animals, because there's no distinction under title I if one is an accommodation or one isn't. There's just no distinction. So we often get concerns from the employer about the service animal being there.

So employers can ask a bit more questions than what is generally regarded for when there's a service animal in a public space. So that is kind of the key part of it being considered like any other accommodation. So there can be some — they can request medical documentation, you know, they could ask to see how the service animal performs, how it acts around other people, just to ensure that the service animal is well-trained to be in the workplace.

Next slide.

### [Allergies]

One that often comes along with service animals is actually allergies, because there are people who might have allergies to certain animals. Typically it's dogs. So with allergies there are a couple of approaches that are kind of like the go-to things. So the first one is if there is a known allergen, the person knows what they are reacting to, it is remove the allergen. If it's cleaning products, air fresheners, if there is a known trigger, removing it is kind of like the first step.

Another way would be, if the source of the allergen can't be moved, move the employee from the area that's there Try to reduce that exposure as much as possible. As is the next one — All of these kind of tend to go together. So providing air purifiers, a way for the employee to step out of the area so that they can get some fresh air. If allergens are coming from coworkers, so, say, perfumes or other types of things generally involves those fragrances, you know, modify their schedule so they have less contact with coworkers, so less people are around, those kinds of things.

The next slide is — Can you tell us a little bit more about managing conditions as accommodations, Teresa?

### [Managing Conditions]

**TERESA:**

Yeah, absolutely. So "managing conditions" is kind of a catchall term for me. There are lots of conditions that come up on the Sensory Team where a person may just need an accommodation to help to manage their chronic medical condition. Could be an allergy. Very commonly on the Sensory Team it's a respiratory condition. Maybe asthma where they need to avoid triggers in the workplace much like a person with allergies would. But they may have additional needs, too, like fatigue that comes with the asthma. So one very important thing to do when someone may have a medical emergency at work, in my opinion, is to offer the chance to voluntarily develop a plan of action.

So we have here on the slide a screenshot from the JAN website actually that talks about a plan of action where a person with a disability would sit down with someone in the workplace and kind of plan out, "In case of emergency, how is this going to flow?" I actually have one like this at JAN for my food allergy, and it's given me a lot of peace of mind and I really appreciate it, but some people may not want to fill one out. This is probably something that you would want to be voluntary.

Some other things that people may need to manage their condition are time off for treatment and recovery for things related to the disability. For instance, a person with spasmodic dysphonia may actually need to travel out of state to receive treatments. Usually people with this condition can benefit from botulism toxin injections in the vocal folds, and they need time off to make that trip and perhaps a day or two off to recover. Other people may experience an exacerbation of their condition like diabetes, for instance, or asthma or COPD and may need to be hospitalized and need to recover.

So we need time off for those things, but some of the things that you can do to help a person prevent those things from happening to an extent and manage their condition if there's a lot of fatigue or a sleep disorder involved also, maybe modifying their schedule could help, job restructuring to remove some duties also very helpful, and ergonomic management of fatigue. What do I mean by that? Let's take a look at the workstation and make sure the ergonomics are good for them, because that may help them to have less fatigue throughout the workday. So that's a little crash course on some typical accommodations to manage conditions.

So could we have the next slide please? Okay. So some more questions. If we have some more questions, please keep them coming.

**TRACIE:**

Let me throw one out here. and I know you want to get some of the hot topics, too, Teresa.

**TERESA:**

If we have time.

**TRACIE:**

Yeah. So I'm going to combine, because we've had a few questions come in around the service animal topic of course, with allergies, so I'm going to combine them a little bit. Essentially boiling down to when you have a situation where you have an employee who has a service animal and an employee who has allergies to dogs, basically who do we accommodate? How do we handle that? What are some solutions with dealing with that type of situation?

**TERESA:**

The superfun thing is you have to try both. Jose, you were going to say something?

**JOSE:**

I get this question very often, and it really is you have to accommodate both individuals. It'll be really depending on the workspace, because it would go into the strategies that we talked about for allergies. So because that's what you are mainly going to look at in this situation, because the service animal accommodation is to bring it to work and allow it to do its job. So, but for allergies we're going — I also focus on like what type of severity of the allergy it is, because sometimes it might have just involved distancing the employees as much as possible. And that can even include like making sure that they know which pathways to take, which to avoid. Air purifiers and filtration system. Seeing if there is a way to have the HVAC system in the building, if there is one, to help remove that hair or pet dander out. Sometimes providing the employee with the service animal with products that can help reduce the dander in while the animal is in the workplace and increase cleaning up the areas to ensure that the allergens are kept to levels as low as possible. But it really is looking at you now have two accommodation situations. You have the case for the employee that needs their service animal as well as the employee that now has an allergy situation.

**TERESA:**

I would say this is a case where a trial or temporary accommodation or an interim accommodation might make a lot of sense, because at first we want everybody to be safe. We want one person to navigate safely or have their medical condition supported safely, and we want the person with the allergy to be safe and not have a reaction. So maybe at first we see can we separate them as much as possible? Is one of them open to telework or is the position amenable to it while we try to work out the details on how we can be safe. That's what I think.

**TRACIE:**

Thank you. Very good. You have some good practical strategies there and some effective solutions. So let's go ahead and keep moving forward just so you can hit these hot topics, Teresa, I know they're of interest to you, and we can leave a little bit of time — I think we have maybe about seven minutes left for content so I can wrap things up in the end, but go! [laughter]

### [Hot Topics]

**TERESA:**

All right. so we just wanted to bring forward to you a couple of the hot topics that we're seeing on the Sensory Team, things that maybe are new or that really have generated a lot of discussion.

So recently we're hearing a lot about AI in every industry, but we're also hearing about it here at JAN. People want to know is AI an accommodation? How would that be used? Do we have to be concerned about people asking for it? And what I always say is, well, surprise, surprise, AI has been a component in things that we're already using as an accommodation. Things we have used for years. Like voice recognition. Like some types of handwriting recognition. What we now call "AI" has been part of that for a long time. And now we're just kind of seeing it come to the forefront across multiple industries and being used in new ways.

Are we seeing some requests for generative AI, for instance, at work? Yeah we are especially by people who may need notetaking assistance and want to do that in an automated way. We're seeing it from people who may want some emotional support at work but don't have anybody to talk to. Maybe they talk to a generative AI maybe during their breaks. And some people are using it for writing support as well. Jose, are you getting any questions like this?

**JOSE:**

Not with relation to generative AI. I have had some employers come with concerns about some products that now have added AI to their need, because that's just a term that has come up in technology now, and people are paying attention to it. But, like Teresa said, there are a lot of products that already had AI in them. It's just that now it might be advertised as such in some cases.

**TERESA:**

It's like adding "2000" to things back in the 90s. It is the latest hot thing. AI has been used as an accommodation for a long time, we just weren't as aware of it, and now there are some new forms.

Virtual sighted assistance is another area of interest. So the Aira.io website is an example of a place to go if you're interested in seeing more about a company that's doing that. They provided an app-based service for a long time, but now they're starting to move into the desktop area. But there are other ways to support an employee who needs sighted assistance at a distance — maybe because they are teleworking for instance — they can screen share with a coworker or screen share with someone who is designated as their qualified reader. So there are definitely different ways to provide this service, and so if you're thinking about offering it, but you're not sure about having an outside company come in, just know there are ways to offer it in-house, and we'd be happy to troubleshoot with you. Anything to add, Jose?

**JOSE:**

No, sorry.

**TERESA:**

So moving on we are seeing more use of virtual reality and augmented reality for people who are in training, and people are just beginning to be concerned about is this modality accessible or not? So Luis Pérez from CAST actually is the person who brought this to my attention first. Thank you, Luis. And CAST is doing some interesting work in this area trying to make sure the trainings that are being developed using virtual reality and augmented reality are accessible. And there are some other resources as well that you can turn to. if you are thinking about implementing this and you want to talk it over, please give me a call. I would love to chat about it.

Again, reading, captioning, notetaking tools — for some reason we're seeing a little bit of a resurgence in interest in these things. I think part of it is because AI can be used for some notetaking and it's kind of resurged interest in it. But we're also seeing employers who don't want things recorded in a virtual meeting and for that reason may be giving a little pushback against things like captioning and notetaking.

And of course telework. Gosh, it's been a hot topic since 2020, and it continues to be. We're seeing a lot of return-to-office initiatives. I'm hearing from HR people who are saying, "Listen. Nobody's going to telework. We have a policy, and there's no telework anymore." Well that's great, but there's also a federal law. So it might make sense to see if there's any room for flexibility here. And remember, there are so many things we can do from home now that we couldn't, and when we're talking about telework it doesn't always have to be all day every day. There may be some wiggle room to accommodate some of these concerns like on-site meetings and teambuilding, etc. Jose, more to add on telework?

**JOSE:**

No, that's really how the questions have been ever since the start.

**TERESA:**

You know, we're hearing great success stories, too. We're hearing from people who say, "I could not do my current job without telework because they picked up and moved out of my city." And we're hearing from employers who say, "We're able to broaden our pool of people from whom we're recruiting, because we're willing to have some people be remote, and it's been a boon." So there's definitely more than one way to look at it.

### [Resources and Referrals]

All right, Tracie. Thank you for bringing up these common referrals and resources. I would say anybody in this field, your state assistive technology project, make them your new best friend. They have so many services that can support you. People that can talk with you about assistive technology, demonstrate it, even send you things in the mail to try out.

If you're not finding what you need, I usually refer to RESNA, the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America. Sometimes they can make a thing. XR Access is a resource for virtual reality. "XR" again standing in for augmented or virtual reality.

And lastly on the slide we have some resources that I often send out if people are like, "We know we have to improve the indoor air quality, but we just don't know where to begin. Can you show me some resources?" NHS, or sorry, NIH and also EPA have some great resources. We have compiled a couple links for you as well.

**TRACIE:**

Teresa, I'm going to hop in here real quick. We only have about two minutes, and I know there are some additional slides, but these are slides related to information you can find on the JAN website, so if it's okay with you we will skip through and just kind of roll these things out.

### [Conclusion]

**TRACIE:**

Okay. So just to point out quick I know certainly check out the A-to-Z for all of these great resources that are available under the Sensory Team realm, and you can go to AskJAN.org for more. Aside from that certainly take a look at the slides — and they're pretty self-explanatory, I would say, and you do have access to those, so you can download those through the email you received today or on the JAN website for this event so certainly take a look at those.

Now of course that is all the time we have for today. That hour flew by so quickly. Teresa, Jose, really thank you so much for this interactive discussion and the Q&A about these accommodation topics and everything the JAN Sensory Team handles. You did a great job. We learned so much today.

Attendees, if your question was not answered, do remember you can contact JAN directly. Use our service for free and confidential consultation. You can go to AskJAN.org, that website, to Live Chat. You can call us at 800-526-7234 or email at us at JAN@AskJAN.org. If you're not already following us on social media, please do that. Find the Job Accommodation Network on Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube, and @JANatJAN on X.

So thank you, everyone, for choosing JAN to help meet your training needs. We do appreciate it. Enjoy the rest of your afternoon, everyone. This concludes today's JAN training.