

High Holiday Kit for Synagogue Professional Staff, Lay Leadership & Volunteers



We Welcome People Of All
Abilities!

<http://RespectAbilityUSA.com/resources/Jewish-inclusion>



As the month of Elul is upon us, our focus turns to the preparations for the High Holiday services. This momentous time is a perfect opportunity to show community members with disabilities how important they are to the fabric of your spiritual community and how you have given forethought to making their time in the synagogue walls as accommodating as possible. We therefore are providing you with a High Holidays Disability Tool Kit to help guide you with ideas to both welcome people with disabilities and educate/sensitize the members of your congregations without disabilities on being more inclusive.

The packet is a guide to help you better implement many of the services that you already provide. We have included tips and ideas to help with language, signage, seating assignments, ushers, and more. Remember, by being explicit you will make people with disabilities feel more welcome, and you will help raise awareness in the non-disabled community that your house of worship is open to one and all equally.

This kit has been provided with the help of Shelley Cohen, Director of the Jewish Inclusion Project. There exists two other High Holiday guides that are very informative, one by Shelly Christensen of Inclusion Innovations and the other is from United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. We have listed their contact information on the last page of this packet.

We at RespectAbility wish you a Shana Tova and sincerely hope you will find this packet helpful. We have a lot more free tools and materials online at:

<http://RespectAbilityUSA.com/resources/Jewish-inclusion>

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Terminology

Use PERSON-FIRST language when speaking with/about people with disabilities

USE:

- The name of the person!
- “Person with a disability”
- “Person who uses a wheelchair”
 - A wheelchair enables people to get around and participate in society; it’s liberating, not confining
- Person with visual disabilities - It’s okay to say, “It was good to see you” and “see you later”
- Person who has hearing loss but communicates in spoken language – “hard of hearing”
- Person with profound hearing loss – “Deaf” or “deaf”
 - Many people who are Deaf communicate with sign language and consider themselves to be members of a cultural and linguistic minority group. They refer to themselves as Deaf with a capital “D,” and may be offended by the term “hearing impaired.”

DO NOT USE:

- “Disabled person”
- “Confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair-bound”
- Euphemistic terms – “physically challenged”
- Negative, disempowering words – “victim” or “sufferer”
- Never appropriate – “crippled” or “retarded”
- Inappropriate – “handicapped”
 - But we acknowledge it’s the standard usage for public signage

Alternate Seating Arrangements

We know seating is always an issue for High Holiday services. Many synagogue members from long-standing congregations have holiday seats that have been in their family for generations. As communities age and as the population with mobility impairments grows, we would like to offer you an alternative way to think about trying to accommodate that population as well as to sensitize your communities to having seating arrangements that allows people with physical disabilities – such as ambulatory, visual, and auditory issues – to receive some type of preferential seating so they can engage in services meaningfully. This allows your congregants without disabilities to feel included in the process, and it facilitates the office to assign seats for congregants and guests with disabilities more effectively.

The below letter can be sent to those without disabilities who have reserved aisle seats or are seated in the front rows of the synagogue.

Dear congregant (Fname),

As always, we look forward to praying together at this momentous time of year – the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur holidays. Since our synagogue is forever working to be a more inclusive, sensitive, and spiritual community, we hope to become a congregation that is more sensitive and inclusive to close to 20% of the Jewish community that has some type of physical, developmental, or learning disability.

To minimize any constraints that would prevent or impede people with disabilities from enjoying services, we would appreciate if congregants without disabilities who have reserved aisle or front-section seats would consider giving up their seat to another member who has physical disabilities/mobility issues.

This will allow us to reserve seats for those congregants and guests with disabilities so they too can enjoy the service. We understand that this request might impose a hardship for those looking to pray together with their families, but we will try to arrange the final seating so families can sit in close proximity.

- **If you are willing to change your aisle seat with those with mobility impairments (might have a walker or a wheelchair), please contact xx – contact info.**
- **If you are willing to change your seat in the front section with those with visual or auditory (deaf, needs to read lips) disabilities, please contact xx – contact info.**

Thank you in advance for helping our congregation be a more welcoming and spiritual community. We look forward to praying together on these High Holy Days.

Childcare Services – Be Sure to Ask about Needed Accommodations

If your synagogue provides childcare services during the High Holiday services, please ensure that you ask parents if their children need special attention so the childcare for their child is safe and successful. On all forms to your congregation regarding childcare services, be sure to include a section for parents to note any special accommodations their children need. Include contact information for someone in the office to handle these requests. All communications about childcare services should note, if that is the case, that accommodations are available upon request.

Be sure that your childcare supervisors are familiar with working with children with disabilities. If they aren't and/or you cannot provide accommodations and services to meet the needs of an individual child, let the parents know in advance; they may be able to provide the needed supports or find an alternative. It is always better to be honest up front on what you can/cannot do.

Machzorim

We hope you ordered large-print machzorim and a braille machzor for those with visual impairments. Please label these on an easily-accessible shelf and tell the ushers to mention them to people they think might need them.

2 Types of Accommodations for Hearing Impairments - Sign Language Interpreters and Closed Captioning for Temples with Live Streaming and/or Screens

Both can be available upon advance request

The **Jewish Deaf Resource Center (JDRC)** provides interpreters fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) to translate the service. JDRC partially reimburses the cost associated with hiring an interpreter for Jewish events. Please contact:

Jewish Deaf Resource Center (JDRC) - <http://www.jdrc.org/>

Attn: Naomi Brunnlehrman

P.O. Box 318

Hartsdale, NY 10530

Voice or Text: 917-705-8941

Video-phone: 866-948-1771

Email: INFO@JDRC.ORG

We suggest that in your mailings about the High Holiday services, you print on the bottom that ASL interpreters are available on request and provide contact info for a point person in your office.

The firm **Total Caption** provides individuals with hearing loss who are not fluent in ASL Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART), also known as captioning, for services that are live streamed. Due to the high volume of requests for CART services during the High Holidays, Total Caption would appreciate your making requests at least

three (3) weeks in advance of the service(s) during which the accommodation will be needed. Please contact:

Total Caption

Attn: Lauren Schechter

315 Pearsall Ave.

Ridgewood, NJ 07450

Phone: (201) 301-2435

Email: lauren@totalcaption.com

People with Disabilities Must be Considered in Any Synagogue's Evacuation Plan

We want to remind synagogues that people with disabilities need to be included in any evacuation plan and emergency procedures. Please make sure the security team has developed a plan that gives thought to those with temporary or permanent physical and developmental disabilities and knows how to guide them during an emergency.

FEMA's Office of Disability Integration and Coordination (<https://www.fema.gov/office-disability-integration-and-coordination>) has information and resources regarding evacuation plans and emergency procedures that include people with disabilities.

Usher Tips for Greeting and Assisting

1. Welcome **all** guests equally:

Speak directly to the person with a disability; converse as you would with anyone else. Smile and greet all congregants. If shaking hands is a protocol, then be sure to offer a hand to everyone who enters the synagogue, regardless of ability level. If you have a question for someone with a disability who has an aide, ask the person with the disability first. The first attempt at conversation should be to the person with the disability instead of the aide. Making small talk with a person who has a disability is great, just like it is for anyone else.

2. Keep all doors and walkways **accessible**:

Make sure people are free to move throughout the space. If an entrance becomes particularly crowded, have another entrance if possible. Displays should not be in front of entrances, wastebaskets should not be in the middle of aisles, and boxes should not be stored on ramps.

3. Be aware of **invisible** disabilities:

Respect the person's needs and requests whenever possible, even if the disabilities are hidden. People may request something or act in a way that appears strange, but requests or behaviors may be disability-related. If accommodations are possible, they should be respected.

4. When in doubt, **ask!**

Ask people how you may assist; do not assume someone needs assistance. Not all people with disabilities need help. Always speak directly to the person with a disability. Be sensitive about physical contact. Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance.

5. Inform people about the **sensory calming room**:

The specifications about the sensory calming room are found in the next section of this packet. Make sure directions to the room are close to the sanctuary doors or are listed in your service packet. There may be moments when the sanctuary doors should remain closed, but please be aware that people with disabilities might need to exit the sanctuary if necessary even in these times. Ushers should let them leave.

6. If a person is **blind or has vision impairments**:

Identify yourself by name and note you're the usher. Offer your arm, don't take theirs. Offer a large-print or braille machzor. If applicable, walk on the opposite side of the guide dog. When walking, describe the setting while noting any obstacles, like "Walk forward to the end of this aisle and make a full right." When you reach the seat, ask if the person needs anything else and say you're leaving.

7. If a person has a **developmental disability**:

Speak to the person in clear sentences, using simple words and concrete concepts. Don't use baby talk or talk down to them. Gauge the pace, complexity, and vocabulary of your speech according to theirs. If the person is an adult, they can make their own decisions, unless you're informed otherwise.

Sensory Calming Room

A sensory calming room should be provided as a community resource for those with sensory overload issues to take a break from services, specifically children with disabilities and their parents. This room should be accessible for those with mobility issues and contain quiet play toys, books, puzzles, and comfortable chairs. Parents would need to chaperone their children. If synagogue custom allows, there should be a live stream or an audio feed of the service so people can still feel like they are a part of the service.

Ushers and clergy should communicate to the congregation that this sensory calming room exists. Directions to the room from the sanctuary should be printed out and posted.

Signs and Directions

Signage helps raise the level of awareness that the congregation is being inclusive of people with disabilities. These clear signs can provide information about important locations, such as restrooms, the quiet room, water fountains, emergency exits, and the sanctuary, plus any accommodations specifically for people with disabilities. Here are examples of signage that might be helpful to use in your synagogue.



ELEVATOR



PLEASE BE RESPECTFUL AND GIVE PRIORITY TO PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY ISSUES WHO NEED THE ELEVATOR

Additional High Holiday Inclusion Kits

Additional High Holiday Kits that you might want to look at are as follows:

Shelly Christensen of Inclusion Innovations

- <http://inclusioninnovations.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/High-Holidays-Inclusive-Congregations-Guide-2015.pdf>
- shelly@inclusioninnovations.com or <http://inclusioninnovations.com/contact/>

United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

- http://uscj.org/images/InclusionHighHoliday_packet-2009final.pdf
- 820 Second Avenue, New York, NY 10017-4504
- Telephone: 212-533-7800
- info@uscj.org