

Involving People with Disabilities in 4-H Youth Development Programs Key Information for 4-H Volunteers

What is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)? The ADA is a civil rights law for people with disabilities. It prohibits discrimination, and guarantees equal access and opportunity for people with disabilities. The ADA requires that people with disabilities be allowed to participate in programs in the most integrated setting possible.

Furthermore, people with disabilities are entitled to accommodations, such as interpreters or enlarged-text materials, which enable them to participate in a program or activity.

How is a disability defined? Disability is defined as “a substantial limitation in one or more major life activities.” Some examples of major life activities include: walking, seeing, breathing, concentrating, hearing, etc. The determination of disability is not based upon a medical diagnosis or label. A person must be substantially limited in a life activity in order to be protected under the ADA.

Who is eligible to participate in 4-H? Youth in first grade are eligible to enroll in the Wisconsin 4-H Youth Development program. First and second graders will participate in 4-H as Cloverbuds. Youth will continue to be eligible for membership through the next 4-H year following their graduation from high school. Membership is open to qualifying youth regardless of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, **disability**, ancestry, sexual orientation, pregnancy, marital or parental status.

Is a 4-H member with a disability eligible for the same services they receive at school? Not necessarily. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires services to be provided to disabled children in school. 4-H is not covered under IDEA.

Although both laws pertain to people with disabilities, the ADA and IDEA have different requirements and eligibility standards. A child is usually entitled to a higher level of services under IDEA than what is required by the ADA. 4-H must follow the ADA: it does not have to follow IDEA. Therefore, a child may be provided services from the school system that s/he cannot receive from 4-H.

What are some important points when working with a youth with a disability?

- **Don't ... make assumptions about a potential disability.**
- **Don't ... talk about a person's disability where others can overhear your discussion.**
- **Don't... charge a fee for an accommodation.**
- **Do... include an ADA statement on any registration materials or publications.**
- **Do... allow a child to participate in 4-H activities.**
- **Do... contact your local county 4-H agent if you have any questions**