

Understanding Disabilities and the ADA: Conversation and Resources

Background

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a civil rights law passed in 1990 and amended in 2008 that was designed to protect the rights of people with disabilities from discrimination. **The ADA ensures equal access and equal opportunity to fully participate in the community.** It applies to employment, to the programs, services, and activities of state and local governments, and to access to the goods and services of businesses and nonprofit agencies. The ADA also addresses telecommunication access for those with communication-related disabilities. To learn more about the ADA, you can read this [Overview of the ADA](http://northeastada.org/resource/ada-overview) (northeastada.org/resource/ada-overview).

Other helpful websites:

www.northeastada.org

www.adata.org

www.ada.gov

Conversation Guide

When speaking to children about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), it is important to convey the key concepts to them in language or terminology that is meaningful to them. Here is a sample suggestion of how this might be done.

The Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA, is a very important law that helps people with disabilities. A disability is something that might make it harder for a person to do certain things, like seeing, hearing, walking, learning, speaking, or reading. The ADA makes sure that everyone gets treated fairly, no matter what their abilities are.

One big idea in the ADA is that people with disabilities should be able to go to school, work, and have fun in the same places as everyone else. That means schools, parks, stores, and other places need to be easy for everyone to use—like having ramps instead of only stairs, or signs in braille for people who are blind.



Another important part of the ADA is making sure people with disabilities have a fair chance at jobs. Employers can't say no to someone just because they have a disability. They also need to make changes, called "accommodations," to help people do their jobs. For example, someone who uses a wheelchair might need a desk that's the right height for them to work. Or, someone might need to take breaks so that they can take medicine for their disability.

The ADA teaches us that we all have different strengths and challenges, and that's okay! What matters most is treating everyone with fairness and making sure no one is left out.