

# Demonstrating allyship for Disabled Wildlife Viewers

## Actions for individuals

**Allyship** is actively and intentionally supporting, uplifting and advocating for a person or group that you do not belong to, often using your privilege to help promote social change.



In 2024, we held focus groups with 32 disabled and neurodivergent wildlife viewers from across the United States, and asked them what allyship and true partnership with disabled people looks like. This is what they told us.

### Be kind

- Be patient
- Welcome people as they are
- Don't be patronizing
- Don't stare
- Don't talk about someone in front of them
- Treat people with disabilities like they're normal people

### Normalize disability

Instead of acting like disability isn't present:

- Assume disability is present
- Use up-to-date disability-related language
- Invite sharing of access needs
- Support the use of adaptive equipment and service dogs

### Promote inclusion

- Be an active ally
- Don't single people out because of a difference
- Be neurodivergent-affirming
- Work to understand, and reduce, the impacts of intersectionality

### Don't make assumptions

- Don't be judgmental
- Don't assume someone's access or support needs
- Don't assume someone's birding/wildlife viewing skill or interest level

### If leading a program

- Provide detailed accessibility information
- Engage the whole group
- Break larger groups into smaller groups
- Communicate in multiple formats
- Incorporate rest breaks
- Travel at the speed of the slowest person

### Counteracting assumptions

- Presume competence
- Appreciate the breadth of disability
- Offer practical assistance
- Ask open-ended questions



For more info visit

[viewing.fishwild.vt.edu/disabled-wildlife-viewers](http://viewing.fishwild.vt.edu/disabled-wildlife-viewers)

Questions? Contact Freya McGregor: [freyamcgregor@vt.edu](mailto:freyamcgregor@vt.edu)



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## Actions for organizations

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### Be genuine

- Embed disability inclusion throughout the organization
- Prioritize funding for accessibility and wildlife viewing improvements
- Implement simple improvements quickly
- Avoid performative actions or tokenism
- Go beyond minimum accessibility standards
- Only describe something as “ADA compliant” if it actually is
- Maintain accessible features you already have
- Work through discomfort
- Avoid ableist messaging and using disability to inspire nondisabled people
- Hire accessibility professionals
- Ensure websites are screen reader accessible

### Stay humble and keep learning

- Provide staff training on disability
- Stay flexible
- Don't assume you know all the answers

### Collaborate respectfully

- Use up-to-date disability-related language
- Consult early, and often, with disabled wildlife viewers
- Incorporate a variety of disabled people's input
- Provide practical support to accessible outing leaders
- Partner meaningfully with disability organizations
- Be transparent, and don't expect free labor

### Normalize disability

- Design for accessibility
- Provide accurate, detailed, objective accessibility information for all trails and programs
- Have a reliable and informed contact person for accessibility information
- Hire disabled people, and support disabled employees
- Provide disability representation in marketing
- Educate the public about how to be an ally



### Promote different methods of wildlife viewing

- Car routes
- Virtual programs
- Disability-specific programs
- Stationary opportunities
- Offer loaner equipment
- Host programs at different times of the day, and on different days of the week
- Promote participatory science opportunities

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