

Talking to People About Their Access Needs

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Having discussions about accessibility can feel awkward if you've never done it before. Here is some guidance on ways you can initiate and maintain conversations about accessibility with your colleagues so it becomes a normalized part of your practice! We've broken this down into the different places conversations about access needs might come up.

Outreach and Events

- Add language to outreach promo materials
 - "We strive to make our space and events accessible to everyone. If you have any access needs for [your intake meeting, this event, whatever thing you're promoting], please reach out to [point of contact] and let us know what you need."
 - For physical events, note basic info about the physical accessibility of the space: "The ABC Center is a wheelchair accessible space. There are two wheelchair accessible bathrooms available. Designated accessible parking is available behind the building."

Intake/Application Forms

- Add language about access needs to all forms
 - "Do you have any access needs we should consider to make this program as accessible as possible for you? Examples include needing captioning, an ASL interpreter, large print materials, extra time on deadlines, etc. You do not need to disclose your disability to have your access needs met. We value your privacy and strive to create an inclusive space for all."

After an Access Need is Raised

- If it is an access need you know how to meet, inform the person that their request has been received and tell them what you are doing to address it.
 - Example: A community member requests CART captioning for an upcoming public webinar. You email them and say that you are working on securing a captioner for the event and that they can reach out to you with any additional questions.

- If it is an access need you do not understand or do not know how to/are unable to meet, ask clarifying questions WITHOUT ASKING FOR PERSONAL MEDICAL INFORMATION.
 - Ex: A client asks for more time to submit materials for a deadline you cannot move. You say, "Unfortunately I can't give you more time to submit these materials. Is there another way I can support you to help you get your submission ready in time? I can help you prioritize tasks or give you feedback on what you already have done."

Getting Feedback on Meeting Access Needs

- After you have attempted to meet an access need, it's always good to ask for feedback! You can do this via a question on a post-event/program survey form:
 - Example: Did you feel your access needs were met? What could we have done to make this event more accessible for you?
- You can also ask more casually in a one-on-one with someone:
 - Example: Let's say a client requested captioning for a recent event. You could ask, "How did the captioning work out for you? Were there any issues?"
 - Don't ask people about their access needs in front of others unless they bring it up first.

Other Tips

- We always want to frame questions about accommodations in terms of someone's access needs rather than their disability/diagnosis. People with many different disabilities have access needs in common. Framing discussions in terms of access needs helps us avoid asking potentially uncomfortable or illegal questions about someone's disability or medical condition.
 - Example: If someone says, "I need somewhere to take a break during this event", DON'T ask, "Oh, are you autistic?". Instead, ask "What kind of space do you need? Would you prefer somewhere quiet?".
- Don't talk about someone's access needs without their consent. If another person asks why a certain accommodation is present, do not indicate who specifically the accommodation is for.
 - Example: If someone asks "Why is there a scent-free policy for this event?", DON'T say "Sherry has MCAS and is allergic to a lot of scented products". Instead, say "We want our event to be accessible to people with allergies or sensitivities to scented products."
- You will likely encounter an access need you cannot meet due to limitations of your budget, physical space, or staff capacity. When this happens, be transparent about why you cannot meet that need, and work with the requester to find an alternative solution.
 - Example: Someone registers for an event the day before it is happening and requests an ASL interpreter. Despite your best efforts, you can't find any

interpreters who are available. You respond to the requester and say: “Unfortunately, we haven’t been able to find an ASL interpreter for this event on such short notice. Is there another way we can try to get you communication access for this event? We can book virtual live captioning, seat you close to the speakers, or work with you to try to find another solution.”