

Accessibility *safety fest* 2011

Access isn't just about wheelchair accessibility- it's about making an event or space accessible to people. Because disabilities and access limitations can look like many different things and are also not always visible, there is so much more to account for than ramps and bathrooms. Below are some resources and things to think about when envisioning Safetyfest 2011 as an event accessible to as many people as possible! Please consider this information as a starting point to initiating conversations with folks about how to, as a volunteer, make accessibility a reality at Safetyfest. We have woven accessibility into each and every part of the planning process.

On Anti-ableism:

Tips for practicing anti-ableism:

[From the Task Force Committee on Disability Oppression and Access of the Creating Change conference]

Above all else access is an attitudinal issue. We are all influenced by a society steeped deeply in prejudicial attitudes about people with disabilities. The inclusion of disability issues as a social justice concern requires time, exposure, and political will. What follows is a brief synopsis of points to consider and reflect upon as you continue in your work:

- **Recognize** that disabled people are inherently worthwhile.
- **Listen** to disabled people's stories, experiences, and perspectives.
- **Understand** that having a disability does not make our lives any more inspirational, pitiful, or tragic than yours. Our disabilities are ordinary and familiar parts of who we are.
- **Use** the phrase "disabled people" or "people with disabilities."
- **Understand** that no single accommodation will work for all disabled people. One solution doesn't fit all, but increased access does benefit everyone.
- **Don't ask** intrusive questions, however well intentioned. Because of how disabled people are separated from society, many of us deal with daily curiosity about our bodies and lives. This can be irritating, exhausting, and demeaning.
- **Ask before you offer help** to a disabled person. What you assume is helpful may not be. Start with a friendly but non-intrusive question: "Can I provide assistance?" Be okay if the answer is no.
- **Be aware.** Disabled people are the experts about our own lives and what we need.
- **Avoid** using Language that equates disabled peoples bodies/minds with brokenness i.e. "lame blind, dumb, stupid, have a fit, spaz out" etc, etc.
- **Recognize** that the words "cripple," "defect, handicap, spastic, freak, retard, and crazy." to name but a few have long been used to bully and oppress disabled people.
- **You may** hear disabled people calling each other "crip" or "gimp," This is "insider" language, akin to 'queer' and not appropriate for use by non-disabled people.

On planning Safetyfest:

As an event planner and a member of communities that are often excluded, I have learned a lot about what people need to participate and wanted to share (and learn) with you. This is a page on all the things people forget about accessibility [basic things to make it easy for people to be a part of something]. Can folks add to this list in the comment sections? When are times you have been excluded? What do you need to participate? Are there things (movements! organizations! listservs!) you are not involved with because of access or a feeling of being unwelcome? If so, I would be sooo thankful if you could share that experience so we could learn from it. xoxo– cripchick

<http://blog.cripchick.com/archives/2910> (an amazing blog to check out!)

Accessibility is:

- **childcare**

do you have childcare so parents can come? will kids be safe and have programming so parents don't have to worry about them?

- **sliding pay scales**

do you have different payment options? if people can't afford your event, can they volunteer their time or services instead?

- **different ways of getting information out**

how do people hear about your events? is it just email and facebook or do you use mailings and phone trees too?

- **gender-neutral bathrooms**

with a long history of trans and genderqueer people being harrassed and in danger when they go into bathrooms, do you have bathrooms where gender does not matter? a lot of times gender-neutral bathrooms are single-room bathrooms where disabled people can also go in with their personal attendants or parents can take their kids. this is helpful for everyone.

- **food options**

do you ask about people's allergies or if they need vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc?

- **wheelchair and other mobility-related access**

is Point A far from Point B for folks that walk? what physical barriers are there?, if you're going to close meeting room doors, are they heavy?, are there chairs for people? are the chairs wide enough that everyone can be comfortable? it's cool to be creative about making things work but know that if basic access requires a lot of energy, people may not come.

- **structured schedules and awareness of time**

always be aware of time. if you are planning an event, it's important that people know the schedule and you try your hardest to stick to it. many autistic people cannot participate if you don't do this. for disabled people who have to schedule out transportation, bathroom trips with personal attendants, etc, a schedule that is always changing means they will miss programming (don't assume people can stay a hour later if you're late on schedule!) if there must be schedule changes, be clear about them so people know.

- **alternative formats**

if people request it, are your documents available in large print, braille, on a cd, or in another language? did you set aside money for ASL (or other languages) interpreters so people can request them? do people know that they can ask for these things?

- **audio description**

is everyone saying their name before they speak? if you giving directions, do you know how to explain it to a person with a visual impairment? if you are watching a movie, does it have audio description or are you prepared to describe what is happening visually? if it is a multi-day event, can you arrange a time where people can go on a tour of the buildings so they know where everything is?

- **accessible language**

does everyone know what you are saying? are you using word everyone knows and if not, can you explain those terms? do your documents and presentations have pictures that explain what is happening?

- **understanding different learning styles**

are you using a variety of different formats? (e.g. media wise— documents, videos, audio, pictures. Presentation styles—large group, small group, interactive activities, art-making, etc?) are your rooms big enough that people can walk around or stand during your presentation if they want to?

- **access to quiet space**

if you are hosting an event, do you have a space where people can go if they need to be alone? do you have flexibility so people can step back if they are getting overstimulated or tired? (for safety at youth events, this works well with a “buddy system” so people can tell someone they are taking a break). it is also helpful to have another lounge where people can go take a mental break and socialize. (this also helps clears up congestion in hallways)

- **commitment to being anti-oppression**

are you committed to creating an environment where people feel safe? allowing people to make comments that are racist, sexist, heterosexist, ableist, classist and more make it hard for people in these groups to participate. try to understand the historical context behind what you say

- **trigger warnings**

if you are about to use a really graphic image, phrase, or story, do you let people know? are there kids there? people in your audience may be survivors of abuse or have PTSD, better safe than sorry.

- **arrangements for carpools/room sharing**

can you arrange for a message board system so people looking for rides can share?

- **identities and experiences**

are you respectful of people’s preferred gender pronoun, disabilities (not all disabilities are visible, go by what folks say instead of assumptions), and backgrounds? remember that no one ever owes you an explanation for who they are.

Also:

Make sure when you set up space for events, workshops, etc, that there is dedicated space for wheelchair users in the front row. Clear chairs away. Make sure aisles are at least 36" wide. make sure people keep the space clear and don't take seat or space that is designated.

Bathrooms have to be accessible, too. ;)

Even one step is a step and makes space inaccessible for chair users.

Designate an area of seating as fragrance free or scent-safer. Explain (in website, promo materials, on stage, etc.) that this space is for chemically injured folks who need to be in space that is free(er) of fragrance. Have short and to the point info in promotional material about what fragrance free means and why it's for real and important. An example is the language below:

"This event will be fragrance free:
yoga maya aims to provide safe & accessible yoga practice. One way we can do this is to provide a fragrance free space. Until our time together, please prepare to co-create a healthy environment for all of us, including community members with environmental illness and chemical injury. We are requesting participants come fragrance free – this means not wearing perfumes/colognes or using shampoos, lotions, or deodorants that aren't labeled "fragrance free," and wearing clothing laundered in fragrance free detergent or baking soda. check out: <http://yogamaya.wordpress.com/fragrance-free/> "

It's great to have this area close to the door or a window so that folks can be near ventilation or leave if they need to. Fragrance free also means no incense, maybe no sage or cedar burned on stage. It also means asking folks to leave their perfume at home! If folks can't totally de-scent (i.e. washing all their clothes in unscented detergent) not using perfume/essential oil. No cologne is a great harm-reduction thing. Also, "natural" scented products are also on the no list.

Access is also about childcare! Childcare is most important for daytime events. It's great to ask folks to let CUAV know if they need childcare by e-mailing or calling in advance so you know how many folks to get.

Visual describers: are folks who can describe verbally what's going on to folks who are visually impaired. Volunteers can be trained in this.

ASL interpreters: need to get text in advance, need to be on stage, there needs to be designated seating for folks who are deaf/ hard of hearing in front of them. Outreach to deaf communities is super important for it to work.

Service dogs are working- petting them or being like "oooh, who's this?" isn't a cute idea.

Allow time for folks who speak slower, use adaptive tech to communicate, to communicate.

In workshops, as part of check in, include a body/access needs check in. Be prepared to break down what this means- many people will never have done it before. It's good to also acknowledge that many folks will feel shy or be closeted about being sick or disabled, and will have a hard time naming their needs.

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