What Is Disability?

> " A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment. - ADA (1990)

- Disability is not defined by the ADA alone. Everyone has the right to self identify! Always refer to the way someone describes themself.
- Disability can be visible or "invisible." You cannot know if someone is disabled by looking at them.
- Disability **does not equal** diagnosis!
- The **Cross Disability Model** is the recognition that disabilities are diverse and include physical, mental health, cognitive, health related, sensory and developmental.

> "For many, the line between ability and disability is self-realization and claiming it for yourself."
> - Imani Barbarin

What is ableism?

> " A system that places value on people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily [re]produce, excel and "behave."   You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.
>
> - A working definition by Talila "TL" Lewis; updated January 2020

Why is this relevant?

More than 90% of all people with developmental disabilities experience sexual assault.

40% of women with disabilities experience sexual assault or physical violence

only 13% of victims of violent crime with disabilities receive support from victim services.

27-81% of victims of police fatalities have mental health or substance abuse disabilities.

49% of people with developmental disabilities were assaulted 10 or more times

14% of men with disabilities experience sexual violence compared to 4% of men without disabilities.

Women who have experienced intimate partner violence are more than twice as likely to also report a disability.

What is access?

> "Access for the sake of access is not necessarily revolutionary, but access for the sake of connection, justice, solidarity, and love has the power to transform.
>
> **- Mia Mingus**

How does truly liberatory access live and breathe in our work?

What are the laws?

Section 504 Rehabilitation Act (1973)

- The first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States.
- Prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that receive federal financial assistance.

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)

- Civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.
- Someone may be protected under the ADA even if they do not consider themselves disabled.

Who benefits from accessibility?

Everyone benefits from accessibility!

- We must do it even if there are no disabled people present.
- Not about charity or "doing the nice thing."
- Access is a human right, not a preference or "special need."
- People with disabilities add value to whatever space they are in.
- Being disabled in a world not built for accessibility forces a person to develop particular skills:
  - Adaptability
  - Asking for help
  - Problem solving and improvisation
  - Patience

During COVID-19

- General Tips
  - Ask about access needs in registrations
  - List what accommodations will/won't be available. Example "ASL interpretation" or "venue is not physically accessible"
  - Watch out for ableist language like "crazy, insane, the R word, stupid, lame, psycho, bi-polar, etc.)
- Interpreters and captioning
  - Make sure the interpreter is appropriate for the speaker
  - Pin the interpreter's video
  - Captions aren't sufficient - ASL is a different language than English
- Technology
  - Zoom Meetings
    - Rev.com captions is a great resource
    - Say your name before you speak
    - Do not require cameras/microphones, allow chat participation
  - Make sure virtual documents are accessible for screen readers
  - Avoid flashing images and low contrast
  - Write at an 8th grade reading level and use sans-serif fonts like Helvetica, Arial, Avenir and Verdana.
  - Slow down speech!
  - Provide agendas, content warnings, and participation expectations in advance, stick to them.
- Client Options
  - Texting
  - Pictures of resources
  - 3 way phone calls
  - Facetime/Zoom
  - Email summaries of what you talked about (best practice)
- To Tell Clients
  - How to use phone for accessibility
- Advocate Considerations
  - Internet access - no free wifi in public space lobbies - prioritize tech access, personal hotspot, safety planning including tech access, wifi. Research free wifi or use financial assistance to provide it.
  - Homelessness and living in their car
- Neurodiversity online
  - Share screen
  - Social stories
  - Be clear, concise, consistent
  - Offer captions
  - Be patient with folks when explaining how to use the technology.

Don't forget accessibility for your staff! Work from home, child care, etc.

During COVID-19 Cont.

- Self Care Counseling
  - Reccomend social media self care accounts, accessibility, disability.
  - Don't rely on breathing techniques because they're not accessible for everyone - always ask!
  - Be mindful of exclusive language like "take a walk" when you could say "spend time outside."
- Court Access
  - Conference calls are often inaccessible. As an advocate, ask for people to slow down or repeat themselves.
  - Get to know the court system better so you can provide their "self help" services since they aren't available in person and don't answer the phone quickly anymore.
- Resource Navigation - make sure to keep up with networking and learning about other services

Enduring after COVID-19

- Continue to offer virtual participation once you re-open. Many people are immunocompromised during non-COVID times as well!
- Physical accessibility
- Continue having conversations about accessibility
- Captions and video for in person events too
- If you added communication options, keep them!
- Follow through - do what you say you will, when you say you will.
- Send emails after meetings.
- Follow service animal etiquette and laws
  - https://www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.html
- Scent free environment (perfumes, essential oils, candles, etc)
- Employee accessibility
  - Keep Slack/communication subscription
  - Flexibility with remote work. This will encourage disabled people to apply to work with you and increase access for staff that may have been uncomfortable requesting accommodations before.
- There are hundreds of access ideas - there's no way we could include all of them here! To learn more, please check out these resources:
  - https://autisticadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Autistic-Access-Needs-Notes-on-Accessibility.pdf
  - https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/
  - https://www.sinsinvalid.org/disability-justice-primer
  - https://www.endabusepwd.org/

Don't be afraid to ASK