

How to Ask Clients about Accessibility

How to raise the topic?

Ask the question at the points of entry to your service, both physical and online – This could be a sign at reception, or a notice on your website that says:

“If you are Deaf or have any disability access needs, please tell us so we can work out how to best support you.”

or you can just ask the question:

“Do you have any disability related access needs that we may need to know about to be able to support you better?”

As part of your initial contact process.

Examples of how you might inquire about specific accessibility needs

Do you need anything to physically get to appointments safely and comfortably?

Such as step-free/level access, information on location of disabled parking options, assistance in reaching the appointment room?

If yes – What do you need?

Do you need staff to treat you in a specific way to feel comfortable or to get your attention?

For example, making/not making eye contact, speaking at a quieter/louder volume, not touching mobility or other assistive equipment and/or touching you on your upper arm to get your attention?

If yes - What do you need?

Do you need information and/or communication to be provided in a specific way?

Such as written/large text, plain English, Easy Read, Braille, audio, New Zealand Sign Language, or extra time?

If yes - What do you need?

When using websites or getting email, do you need information to be provided in a specific way?

Such as ensuring that digital resources are compatible with a screen reader, NZSL video versions, copies of correspondence sent to support person?

If yes - What do you need?

Do you need anything to help you understand information?

Such as a longer appointment time and/or support person

If yes - Do you require support from someone you trust when you need to make a decision? - *[For example, because of a learning disability, brain injury, dementia and/or other cognitive or physical condition?]*

What else do you need?

Do you need anything specific to feel mentally or emotionally safe and comfortable?

Such as avoiding triggering behaviour or situations, using “stimming” or fidget devices, and/or provision of a quiet/low sensory space?

If yes - What do you need?

Do you need anything to help you manage your energy levels or tiredness, or to help you concentrate?

For example, do you need appointments at certain times of day, do you need time to recover after a meeting, do you need to take breaks during meetings?

If yes – What do you need?

Do you need anything to manage your personal cares fully, safely and comfortably?

Such as accessible bathroom facilities, facilities to safely store food or medication and/or opportunities to eat food or take medication?]

If yes - What do you need?

Do you need anything else to access our service fully, safely and comfortably?

If yes – what do you need?

Some general advice

- Don't treat asking about accessibility needs as a "one and done" action.
- Keep checking in to see if the strategies are working for the person. A quick question at the end of the meeting along the lines of "how is this working for you? Is there anything that you'd like us to change about how we work with you?"
- **What a person may need for a short initial appointment at your office may be different to what they may require if they are attending a lengthy mediation session, or a court hearing. Make sure you check with the person what may be needed if different circumstances arise. Do this in plenty of time to arrange disability accommodations ahead of the scheduled date – Don't leave it to the last minute**
- Be clear and precise with your questions and responses
- "Big" questions may need to be broken down to smaller questions
- **Don't be afraid to check if the person understands what you've told them – many people with neurodiversity, communication issues, or cognitive issues may indicate they understand even if they don't**
- Let people know it's ok to ask you to repeat or clarify what you've told them

When in doubt – follow the golden rule

Golden Rule – Ask, Don't Assume

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