

DC SAFE

Resource Guide for

Survivors with Disabilities

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Originally created: November 2020

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Introduction

Purpose Of This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide a "cheat sheet" for advocates and clients when it comes to navigating services related to disability in the Washington DC area. While this guide is comprehensive, it may not contain every available resource. Additionally, please check links before referring to make sure information is not out of date.

Why Does Knowing About Disability Matter When Working With Survivors Of Domestic Violence?

According to the [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#) just over one quarter of the adult population in the United States has some form of disability. This means that although we rarely see disability represented on television and in the media in meaningful ways, there is a very high chance you know or will work with someone who has a disability.

Unfortunately, according to the [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence \(NCADV\)](#) the presence of a disability increases someone's risk of experiencing sexual or domestic violence. It also decreases the likelihood that they will report the violence to the authorities, and that that report will be taken seriously by the authorities if the violence is reported.

People with disabilities can live full and meaningful lives, however they often experience barriers in accessing basic needs such as housing and employment. Therefore, knowing how to access the services that exist to support individuals with disabilities can be essential for survivors with disabilities.

It is also important to note that disability is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of conditions from mobility issues to developmental delays, and mental health conditions. This means that many of the individuals we work with may have a disability without identifying as a person with a disability or disabled

person, but identifying with those labels usually isn't required to access disability services. When it comes to accessing services, what matters more than how a person personally identifies is whether or not they have a documented diagnosis of some kind of disability, including mental health conditions.

How to Use This Guide

Following this introduction, the first section of this guide contains some basic notes on working with survivors with disabilities, including basic etiquette and best practices, some notes on language, and a list and brief exploration of some of the unique concerns of this population.

The next section contains both local and national resources that may be helpful to be aware of when working with clients with disabilities. The resources in this guide are broken down by location and type of resource. The guide starts with resources exclusively serving individuals in the DC area, and moves to national resources. Please note that each of the resources in this guide have their own eligibility requirements, so it is important to encourage clients to check on eligibility requirements when utilizing these resources.

The final section of this guide has a listing of blogs and websites written by people with disabilities, as well as some links to statistics, articles and research about disability and domestic violence, and some general advice on how to effectively navigate disability service providers and organizations.

The blogs and websites created by disabled individuals do not directly pertain to domestic violence, but have been provided in case you're interested in learning more about the nuances and diversity of the disability community and disability culture, which our clients may or may not identify with.

If you are looking to quickly locate any portion of this guide, simply go to the table of contents and click the link that corresponds with the type of resource or kind of information you are trying to locate.

Finally, please note that this guide is intended to be a living document, and will hopefully be updated and expanded over time. If you find any resources you think would be helpful to include, feel free to link them in the appropriate section.

Helpful Hints and Advice for Working with Survivors with Disabilities

The Basics: Disability Etiquette 101

The most important thing to remember when working with survivors with disabilities is not to make assumptions. We have a saying in the disability community that goes something like, "if you know one person with a disability, you know one person with a disability." What that means is, just like anyone else disabled people are individuals. We have individual needs, wants, and desires, and we all access things in different ways.

Just because something works for one client with the specific condition, doesn't mean it will work for all clients with that condition. Most disabilities are spectrums, and people with the same diagnosis, condition or label can have very different abilities, needs, and experiences.

Below are some basic tips to end the awkwardness that exist for many people when dealing with disability:

- **If you don't know, just ask!** One of the biggest reasons people make assumptions around disability, is that they're afraid to approach it, ask questions, and ask for clarifications, but the reality is most people with disabilities would rather you ask them what they need support with and what they don't then make assumptions. It's important to remember that for many people disability is not inherently a bad thing, and we don't have to tiptoe around the issue like it is.

- **Talk to the person with a disability first, not their support worker.** Even if they have someone with them, always always always address your questions and comments directly to the person with the disability. Look at them when you're speaking, not the person supporting them. If for some reason they need help answering, they or their support worker will let you know, but it's always best to assume competence and assume that people can speak for themselves.
- **Make it a practice to ask EVERYONE about access and accessibility needs.** One of the best ways to destigmatize the conversation around disability is to make it ordinary. Therefore, it is a good idea to make it standard practice to ask all clients about any access work disability needs they may have. This allows people to tell you what their needs are without having to awkwardly disclose disability if they're not comfortable, and it also opens up the conversation and lets the person know they can talk to you about these issues. Just like asking for pronouns, asking about access and accessibility needs creates a more inclusive environment for everyone.

Some Notes on Language

At first, talking about disabilities can be difficult for some people, largely because we are not taught how to talk about them appropriately.

When talking about disability, here are a few things to remember:

- **Disability is not a bad thing!** For most people, being disabled or having a disability is not inherently bad, and so we shouldn't be afraid to talk about it as long as we do so respectfully. It is oftentimes worse to have your disability ignored, or treated like something taboo, then to be asked directly about it!
- **Euphemisms.** In general, when it comes to disability avoid awkward euphemisms like "differently abled", "people with different abilities", or

outdated terminology like "handicapped. Even though the intention behind euphemisms may be harmless or even good, they often erase the experience of disability as an identity and a unique way of existing in the world. Remember, as mentioned above disability is not a bad thing, it's okay to say the word.

- **Person first versus identity first language.** Different groups and individuals identify differently when it comes to person first (i.e. person with a disability) and identity first (i.e. disabled) as preferred terms and language. Your best bet is to mirror how somebody self identifies, or even ask them the terms they prefer you use when talking about their disability. Never use antiquated language such as "confined to a wheelchair" or "wheelchair-bound". This language is dehumanizing and takes people's agency away. When in doubt between person first and identity first language, it is probably safest to stick to person first language unless you are explicitly told otherwise as some people are very uncomfortable with identity first language, but again you should respect whatever language the person uses to identify themselves.
- **Language around mental health conditions.** Many people have mental health conditions and disabilities, and again this can sometimes feel awkward to ask about, but not talking about it only increases the stigma and makes it feel like it's taboo when it shouldn't be. The key when talking about mental health is to be respectful and avoid obviously derogatory terms like "crazy", "insane", etc. it is also better to use the phrase mental health condition or mental health disability instead of terms like mental illness that tend to have more stigma attached to them.

Unique Concerns of Survivors with Disabilities

Survivors with disabilities have a number of unique concerns that are important to take into consideration when trying to provide appropriate and effective support.

Some of these concerns are listed and explored below:

Access to personal care and other related support: One of the reasons abuse of people with disabilities is so pervasive is the need for care that many people with disabilities experience. Whether a person needs care or support with their day-to-day activities is unique to each individual person. However, if you are working with the client who needs this type of assistance it's important to note that leaving may be more difficult as intimate partners often act as caregivers or take a very active role in managing that care.

Access and accessibility: While things like housing and transportation can be challenging for any survivor, disability can add a whole new layer of difficulty to the equation. If someone has a physical or mobility disability, finding accessible housing and shelter can be extremely difficult.

One thing you can have a client do to mitigate this difficulty is asking them about their specific access needs. That way you help them think about what is accessible for them, versus what is considered accessible in general.

For example, if a client would need help to cook even if they had an accessible kitchen, an accessible kitchen may not be a necessity, whereas if the client would be able to cook independently with an accessible kitchen that becomes a more relevant issue.

This can be a helpful exercise in getting the client to think about what they need in a placement to live as safely and independently as possible, as opposed to worrying about whether something is technically and legally considered fully accessible under the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA).

Fears around losing independence and autonomy: For many individuals with disabilities, independence and autonomy are extremely important, as they are to everyone. However, when an individual has a disability interacting with the legal and police systems can come with the added risk of putting their independence and autonomy in jeopardy. Individuals may fear leaving their partner means that they will no longer be able to live in the community and will have to go into a

group home or other institutionalized care, which for many people is their worst fear. Many of the resources in this guide can help survivors mitigate that risk, but it's important to know that that concern may be in the forefront of their mind, especially if they need care and support on a daily basis.

Resources

DC/DMV Specific Resources

Government Agencies/Nonprofit Organizations (General)

- [Services for Adults with Disabilities \(Age 18 and Older\) \(DC Department of Aging and Community Living\) | dacl](#)- This link provides a comprehensive list and description of all the services offered by DAACL for individuals with disabilities over the age of 18. Each of these services have their own requirements, so it is important to tell clients to check into the requirements of specific programs before applying.
- [DC Department of Disability Services \(DDS\)](#)- DC Department of Disability Services oversees a range of programs and services for individuals with disabilities living in the district. These include independent living services, employment programs, and more. See this link for a full list of [DDS Services](#)
- [Additional Disability Nonprofits in the District of Columbia \(List Maintained by DC DDS\)](#)-This link provides a comprehensive list of disability service organizations in the District of Columbia. It may not include every disability service organization, but the ones on the list have been vetted by DDS.

Housing and Homelessness

- [Single Family Residential Rehabilitation Program \(SFRRP\) | dhcd](#)- A program by the Department of Housing and Community Development in DC to help disabled individuals pay for modifications to make their single-family homes accessible. This program also pays for roof repairs.
- [Home Repair | Habitat for Humanity of Washington DC](#)-Provides adaptations to homes for low-income individuals with disabilities through [DC Safe at Home](#)
- [DC Center for Independent Living](#)-The DC Center for Independent Living (DCCIL) is a nonprofit organization that helps individuals with disabilities achieve independent living through advocacy and support provision. Typically these organizations are run by people with disabilities for people with disabilities, and take a peer to peer mentoring approach.
- [Equal Rights Center \(ERC\)](#)-The ERC is a good place to contact if somebody is experiencing housing or employment discrimination for a reason related to one of their identities i.e. race, gender, sexual orientation, disability etc.

Transportation

- [Uber WAV- What Is WAV? | Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles In Minutes](#)-Ubers for people with mobility devices in the DC Metro Area.
- [MetroAccess Paratransit](#)-MetroAccess is a shared-ride, door-to-door, paratransit service for people whose disability prevents them from using bus or rail.
- [Reduced Fare Program](#)-Reduced fare metrocards for qualified individuals with disabilities and seniors (65+)

National Resources

Programs You Are Eligible For When You Qualify For Medicaid, SSI, SNAP, TANF, Etc.

(Not Specific To Individuals With Disabilities, But Many Individuals With Disabilities Will Qualify Due To Utilizing Medicaid Or SSI Programs):

- [Internet Essentials from Comcast](#)-\$9.95 a month Internet through Comcast for individuals on certain public benefits, including SNAP, Medicaid, and SSI.
- Free cell phone and cell phone service available through [SafeLink Wireless](#) or [Assurance Wireless](#) for individuals on certain public benefits, including SNAP, Medicaid, and SSI.
- \$5.99 a month [Amazon Prime](#), including Amazon Fresh which allows groceries to be purchased online using SNAP for individuals on certain public benefits, including SNAP, Medicaid, and SSI.

National Organizations

- [Administration for Community Living](#)
- [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services](#)
- [National Council on Independent Living \(NCIL\)](#)
- [National Disability Rights Network \(NDRN\)](#)
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Other Helpful Sites, Articles, and Information

Blogs and Other Websites Run by People with Disabilities

Below are a few great blogs and websites with personal stories and general information about the personal experiences of disabled people, if you are interested in learning more about the disability community and disability culture!

- [Claiming Crip](#) (Karin's blog)
- [Rooted in Rights](#)
- [Words I Wheel By](#)
- [The Sleepy Girl Guide to Social Security Disability](#)
- [Tonia Says](#)
- [Crutches and Spice](#)

Statistics, Personal Stories, and Best Practices

- [Domestic Violence and People with Disabilities: What to Know, Why It Matters, and How to Help-National Coalition Against Domestic Violence \(NCADV\)](#).
- [Abuse in Disability Communities - The Hotline\(National Domestic Violence Hotline\)](#)
- [Stop Telling Me That I'm Pretty for a Girl in a Wheelchair: How Your Words Contribute to Violence Against Women with Disabilities \(The Body is Not an Apology\)](#)
- [Violence Against Women with Disabilities \(womenshealth.gov\)](#)
- [People With Disabilities Resources \(National Coalition to End Domestic Violence\)](#)
- [Abuse Of Women With Disabilities \(American Psychological Association\)](#)

General Tips for Dealing with Disability Services

- If a client is applying for something like personal care services or an EPD waiver, or even assistance with school/employment services, it can be helpful to remind them not to sugarcoat or downplay their needs. As a person with a disability, this can be difficult because we are often told to act as nondisabled as possible, but the reality is when you're trying to get services and supports you need to make sure they know just how much you need the help. On that note, if you need help sometimes, answer yes on all assessments, or you won't get the help at all.
- For most services, mental health conditions, accident/combat/violence acquired disabilities, and age acquired conditions do count as serviceable disabilities, however some agencies have specific requirements for the types of disabilities an individual must have to be eligible for services, so it is always a good idea to check on the requirements of the organization, program, or agency before applying.
- Know your diagnosis/diagnoses, and have documentation readily available whenever possible. A lot of service organizations require service users to show proof of their disability, and oftentimes, an SSI letter is not enough. You typically have to show some kind of letter from a medical doctor or caseworker detailing your diagnosis and the severity of your condition.
- Be persistent, and don't be afraid to advocate for yourself or your client. Disability services organizations often make you jump through hoops to get what you need, but that doesn't mean you should give up. With the knowledge provided in this guide, and a good amount of persistence your client should be able to get the services they deserve.