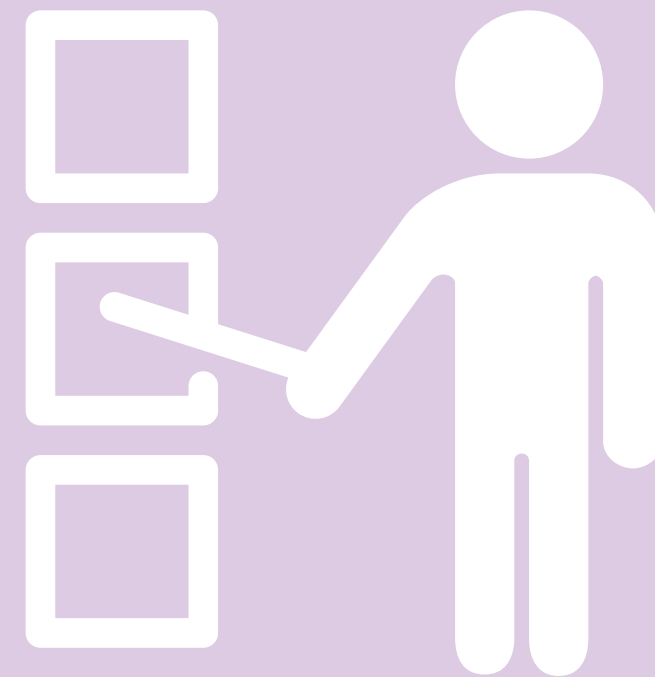
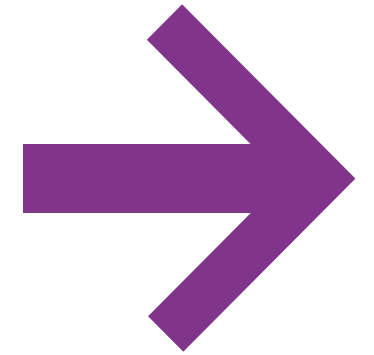




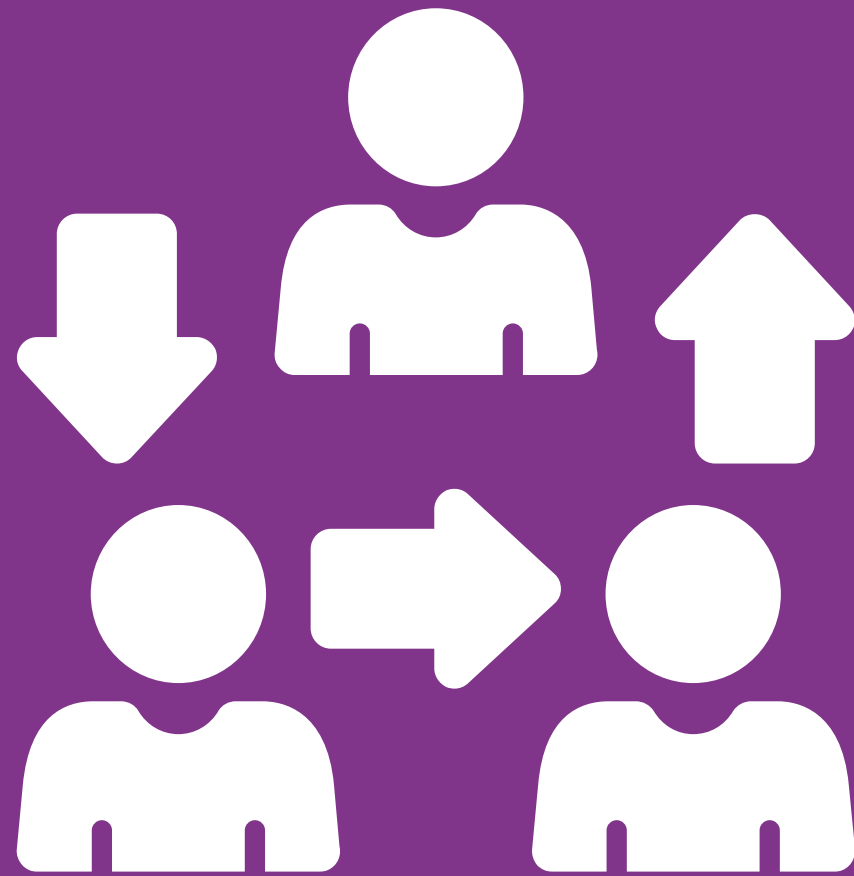
Disability Awareness

in Higher Education
for Academic & Service
Staff

askds@tcd.ie



Training Aims:



**To deepen understanding of
disability within the framework of
the social model of disability and
explore its intersectionality to
foster inclusion in all aspects of
life, including higher education.**

Who Am I?

Inclusive Internship Officer

- **Autism**
- **ADHD**
- **Writing**
- **Chronically Ill**
- **Late diagnosed**



Jen O'Connor



Disability Awareness in Higher Education Priorities



01.

Awareness &
Acceptance

02.

Inclusive
Practices

03.

Intersectionality

Areas of Focus



01.

Stereotypes &
Stigmas

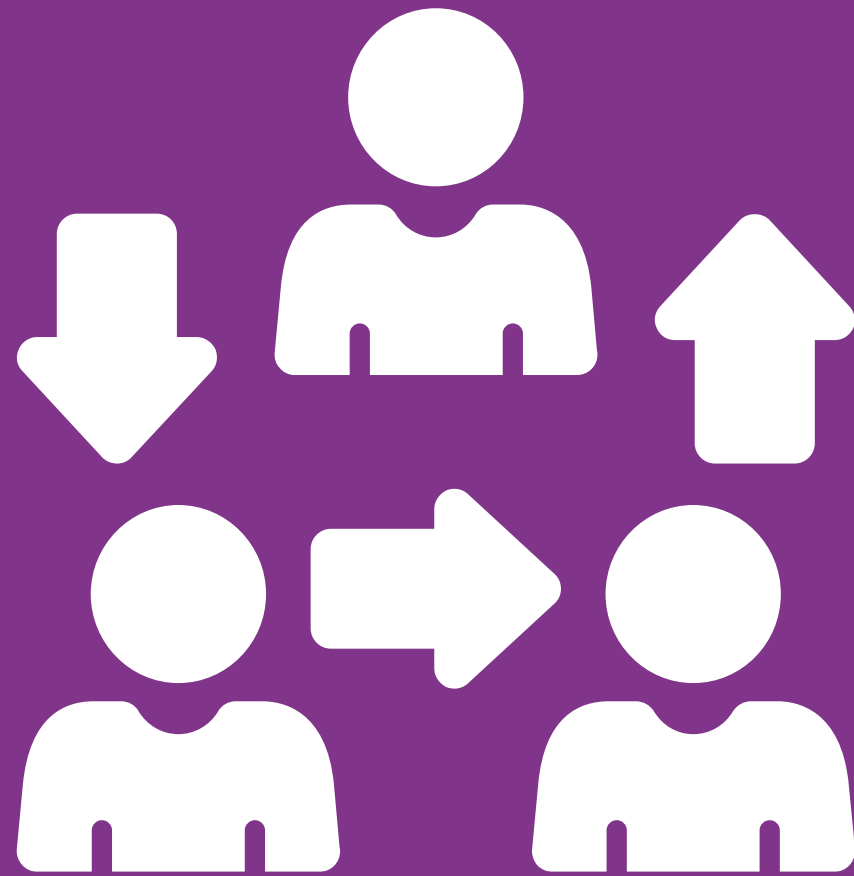
02.

Access &
Accessibility

03.

Communication
& Language

Disability & the Biopsychosocial Model



- **The biopsychosocial model proposes that a person's experience of disability is not simply the result of biological factors, but also psychological and social factors.**
- **It is important to create a distinction between disability and impairment, whilst addressing social, cultural and environmental barriers.**
- **We must address our internal biases which may have been informed by the medical model - a deficit-based view of disability.**

Understanding Intersectionality & the Complex Lives of Students



Students with intersecting marginalised identities experience unique challenges - which calls for unique responses by academics & services and individualised empathy.

It is essential to consider that how a disabled student presents when accessing a service is impacted by the other areas of marginalisation they might identify with.

Consider the following:

- Sexuality
- Gender identity
- Race & ethnicity
- Socio economic status

A Hierarchy of Disabilities

Many of the students which access supports through the Disability Service express varying degrees of acceptance that they receive from academic and service staff. For example, students with mental health conditions often have a more challenging time accessing the understanding of staff than those with physical disabilities.

Our role is support and understanding

- - not deciding severity of experience.

We serve students best by trusting the truth of their experiences of challenge and difficulty.

-



Reframing Stereotypes, Myths & Stigma

No one experience of disability, despite identical diagnosis is the **same**. No two students' support needs will be identical, and we must remain flexible in our thoughts.



A student's ability to communicate, both verbally and in writing, can vary and **fluctuate** due to a variety of factors. Just because a student has communicated clearly in the past, does not mean there current struggle is not real.



Reframing Stereotypes, Myths & Stigma

Whilst there has been an **increase** in the overall diagnosis rates of certain conditions (ADHD, autism etc.), this does not make a person's recent diagnosis less valid.



The work submitted by disabled students can be to the same **quality** of their non-disabled counterparts. However, the chances of this greatly increase when they are met with your understanding.



Levelling the Playing Field - Special Treatment Myth

We often hear from academics and staff that by giving students access to reasonable accommodations, they are doing the other students a disservice. We ask you to consider the following:

- Equality is not the same as equity. It would be an equal experience for an autistic primary school student with an intellectual disability to be in a mainstream class.
- However, because of how the environment interacts with their needs, the education they receive would not be equal.
- True equity would be ensuring the student has access to an autistic classroom and/or an SNA.
- By honouring a student's needs, you are helping to level the playing field.

Additional Considerations

Many students experience more than one disability, and not everyone is diagnosed.

Students often find staff intimidating to approach.

Try not to presume that a student has fully understood what you are communicating.

Consider the student's journey to get to get to the service - was it overwhelming?

When talking to a student 1:1 take pressure off eye contact.

Offer multiple modes of being contacted or communication.

Everyday Ableism

Hearing new words, such as ableism, that have grown in their usage in recent years can make some people unwilling to understand the concept, believing it to be a fad or trend.

- Ableism is simply discrimination in favour of able-bodied people, an experience which has occurred throughout history,

- As language evolves, students' ability to communicate the attitudes they face from society also evolves.

Ableism in Services - Examples

Dismissal of a student's
attempts to self-advocate

Inaccessible materials

The physical
environment of the
service

Sharing a student's
diagnosis without their
consent

Repeated use of
demoralising language

Shifting conversation from
student needs to service
limitations

Academic Ableism - Examples

Disregard for a student's
LENS report

Inaccessible classroom
materials

Hosting classes in
inaccessible spaces

Sharing a student's
diagnosis without their
consent

Repeated use of
demoralising language

Referring to a student's
LENS or accommodations
in the classroom

Access and Accessibility



Being able to access the built environment, products and services, and communications is an experience all students should have throughout their university experience.

Some aspects of accessibility to consider when providing materials: **visual, auditory, cognitive, mobility, speech.**

It is important to note that whilst we cannot always change the physical environment of services, we can ensure that our interactions with students highlight that we are available to hear their concerns and receptive to their needs. This has the vital long-term effect of helping the students to advocate for themselves with confidence.

Remember, if you are concerned or unsure about how to make your materials accessible, you can ask for help at askds@tcd.ie.

Accessibility Challenges Continued



- Having an averse sensory response to settings (lighting, noise, volume of people, etc.).
 - Long waiting times when accessing services.
 - Lack of clear information regarding opening hours or changes to the location.
 - Being penalised for the legibility of their writing or receiving verbal negative feedback about a factor that is outside of their control.
 - Delays in service follow-up, especially when promised.
 - Finding mandatory appointment attendance anxiety-inducing.
 - Feeling unable to leave a service to see to their needs.
 - Captioning software struggling with the speed of speech.
-

Communication & Language



Communication

- It is important to offer multiple modes of communication for your content.
- It is also important to realise that many students find certain modes of communication difficult and this can cause a **delay** in communication.

Inclusive Language:

Whilst the topic of inclusive language in relation to disabilities is broad, there are two key points that are helpful to walk away with.

- Though no one community can agree on everything, there seems to be a majority preference for identity first language - 'disabled person' 'autistic person' etc.
 - If you are in doubt about your language use - **ask**. Engage with the students in good faith.
-

Building Inclusive Environments

When considering how you can reasonably adapt your space for the needs of disabled students, remember that you will always receive the most accurate advice from the students themselves. Encourage consistent **conversation** about their needs, with you.

01.

When in doubt, ask the students for feedback.

02.

Verbally remind students to do what they need to make themselves comfortable.

03.

If necessary, be open to hosting meetings in alternative locations.

04.

An inclusive service is built upon respectful language and communication.

Intersectionality in Action:

A Student's Daily Journey at Trinity

Morning:

Salma is a first year nursing student at TCD, who is navigating her first semester as an autistic woman with a neurological condition that limits her mobility. Salma's lectures begin early and despite not being able to sleep due to chronic pain, she gets up early. She needs to take public transport before rush hour to avoid the sensory overwhelm of crowds, otherwise she will feel sick and anxious all day.

Arriving on campus early in the morning, Salma needs to sit for a long time before her first lecture to allow her blood pressure to normalise. It is not yet 9am, and her bones are aching. She is also uncomfortable because she realises in her rush to leave the house, she put her socks on inside out. The sensory feeling of the seam on her feet is physical painful, but Salma does not want to seem 'weird' by taking off her shoes in public and the bathroom is too far of a walk for her heartrate.

Salma meets her friends for their first lecture, and smiles. They do not know she is struggling. They want her to come on a night out. After all, they will never be first years again.



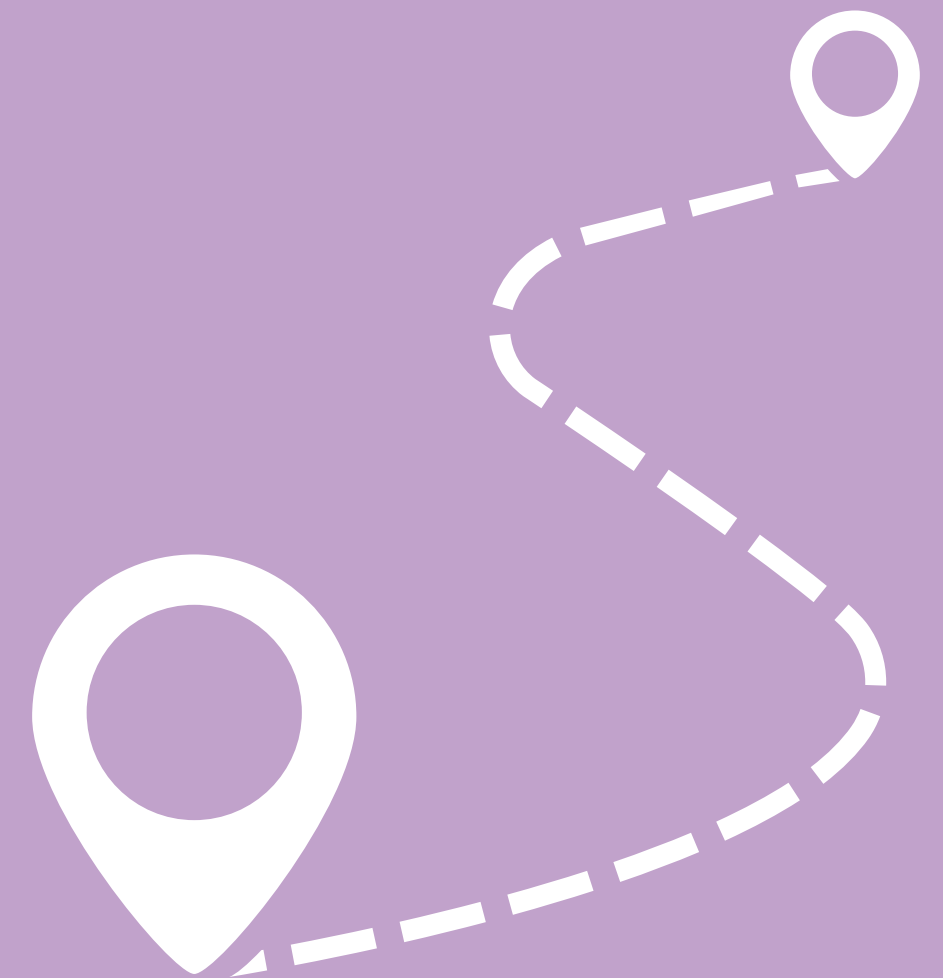
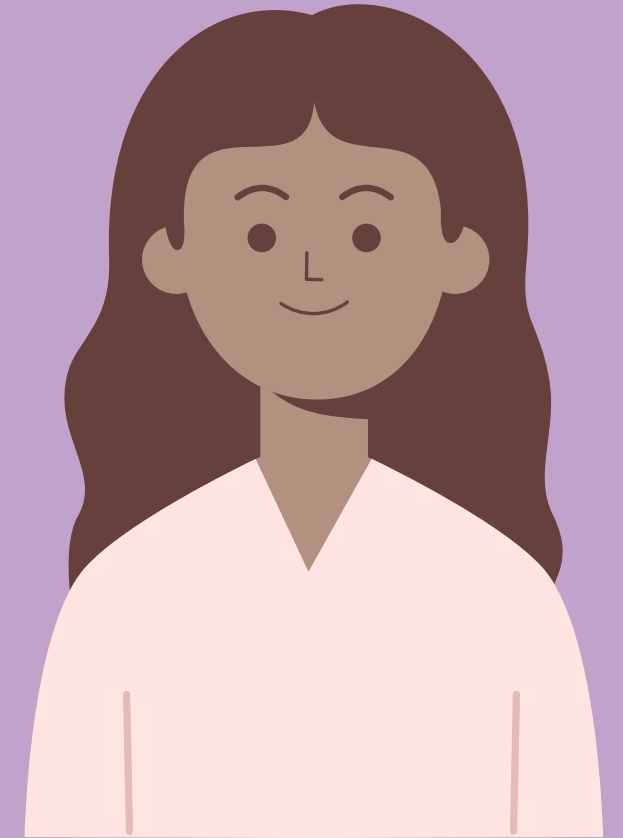
Intersectionality in Action:

A Student's Daily Journey at Trinity

Afternoon:

After three lectures back to back, Salma is fatigued. She had to walk across campus rapidly to get to a lecture in the five minute break between classes, but the speed caused her blood pressure to drop and she's now nauseous. Telling her friends that she will catch up with them in the library later, and goes to the nearest bathroom. Sitting on the floor of the cubicle, Salma cries.

Salma takes out her phone and considers texting her mother that she is crying, but knows that her mother, along with her doctors, will suggest she defer her place at Trinity. They will ask her how she ever expects to 'survive in the real world' and Salma wants nothing more than to be a nurse. After an hour on the ground, Salma gets up to go to another lecture. It is mandatory attendance and the lecturer does not believe in recording their lectures. Salma cannot focus however. A fluorescent light overhead is blinking, the sight of which is physically painful to Salma. It is like sharp spears behind her eyes.



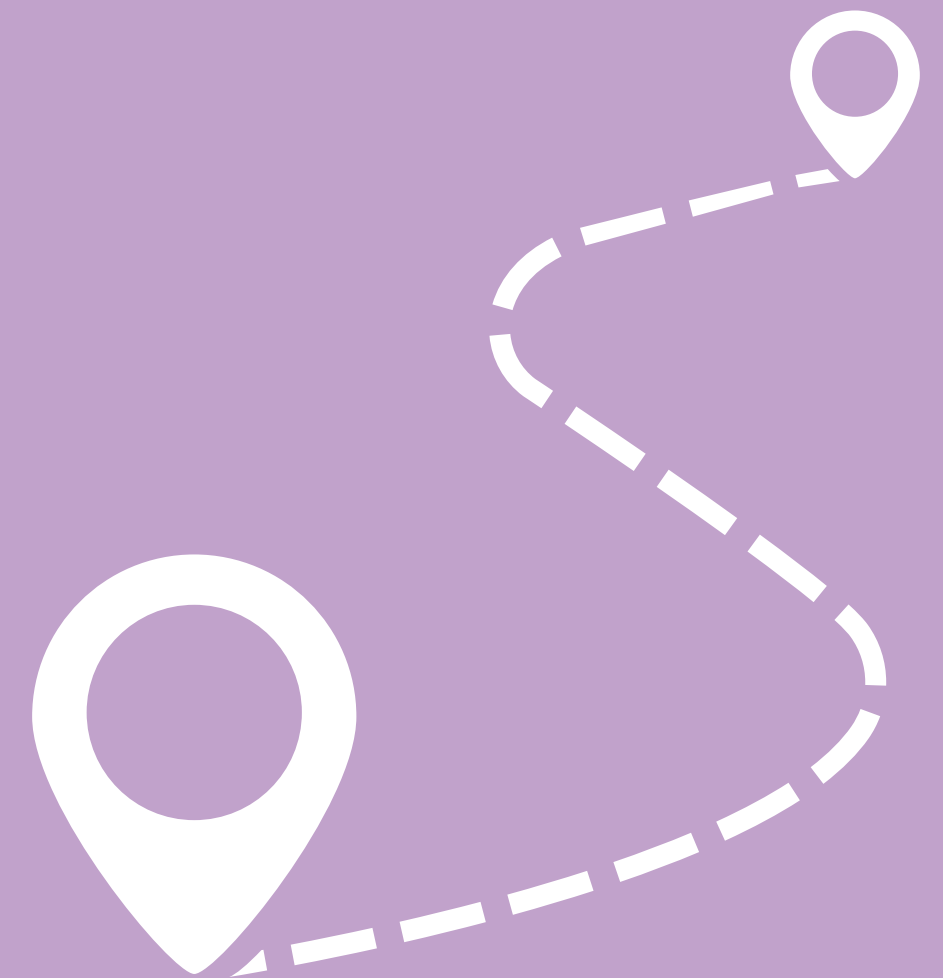
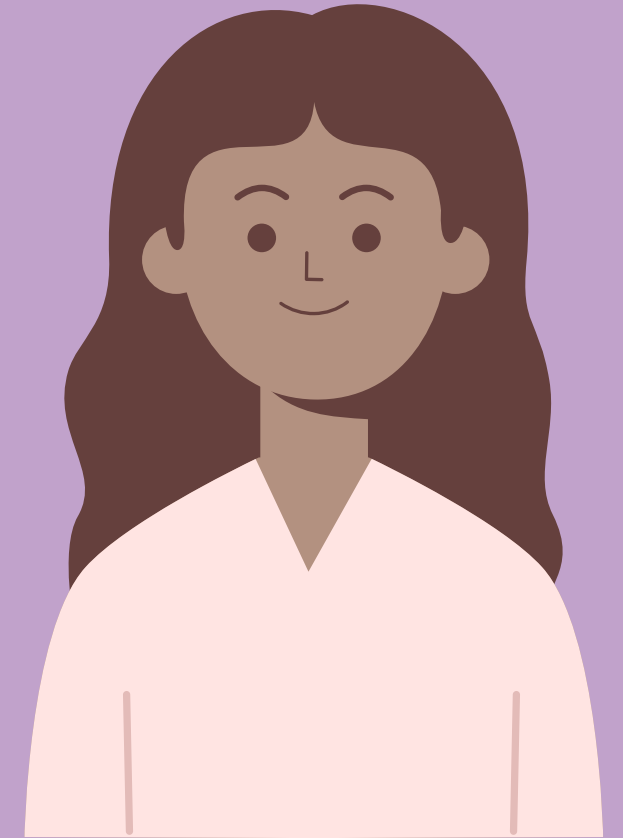
Intersectionality in Action:

A Student's Daily Journey at Trinity

Evening:

After their last lecture, Salma's friends want to go to grab a coffee before heading to the library. Salma runs through the consequences of joining them in her mind: coffee makes her blood pressure unstable. Her friends love a coffee shop that is small and filled with strong scents and the last time Salma was there, she had a panic attack because a baby did not stop crying. Socialising will take from her energy reserves and she still needs to make the hour long commute home. Salma apologises and excuses herself, heading to the Luas stop. At this point, the straps of her bag are sending sharp shooting pains from the top of her spine to her toes that makes her uneven on her feet. She stumbles into someone as she gets on the Luas, and is called a racial slur. The word hits Salma and freezes her as all of the other passengers look away awkwardly.

Salma gets a seat on the Luas, but when an older woman asks her to give it up, Salma does not feel as though she can refuse. On the outside she looks young and healthy. As a result, when Salma gets home, she has to wait awhile before making it upstairs. She does not get deep sleep that night.





Responding to a Disability Disclosure

Your sole role in responding to a disability disclosure, in the moment, is to actively listen.



As you listen, keep in mind what it took for an individual to decide to disclose to you. The road from the decision to disclose to actually doing so often long and filled with many doubts.



Responding to a Disability Disclosure

Put your pre-concieved ideas about every individual disability aside and focus on the person in front of you. Who are they as a whole? Consider their hobbies, passions, families and ambitions when you respond with compassion.



Ask the person what they would like you to do next, and if they do not know, state that choices do not have to be made immediately. Do, however, check if this disclosure needs to remind private.



After a Disclosure - Next Steps

After the individual has had time to consider the next steps of their disclosure, have an open conversation with them in which they guide the information.

It is important to remember all that you do not know and to approach this interaction with a learning mindset.

Offer potential next steps:

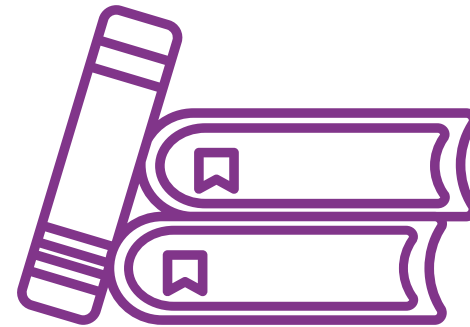
- Exploration of reasonable accommodations.
- Suggestions of training for the team regarding general disability awareness.

Invite the individual to offer you direct and honest feedback about how they feel your organisation or department treats disabled individuals.

Reflecting on Your Service or Academic Practices



It can be a daunting thought to examine your own interactions with disabled students and how you have previously handled possibly miscommunications.



However, when considering what to change in your practice, consider engaging with student feedback. Place yourself in the mindset of someone who is struggling in a variety of ways (physical mobility, pain, sensory, cognitive differences etc.) - where would you like to experience increased compassion?

Questions & Follow Up



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