



Accessing Sexual Assault Services with a Disability

One in four people in the United States has a disability, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). That is a lot of the population. It is important to know that disability is not a static state or an identity that you must be born into. All of us have the potential to become disabled in our lifetime.

Sexual assault intersects with disability in two major ways. First, a perpetrator sees vulnerability in someone with a disability and decides to perpetrate violence on them. Second, someone who experiences sexual violence can result in trauma to one's body and mind in a way that results in a disability.

If a survivor with a disability has difficulty accessing services, it is not a problem with that survivor, it is a problem of barriers to services. Our world has been built in a way that puts up barriers and people with disabilities are limited by those barriers. Barriers include: Physical barriers, communicational barriers, policy and procedural barriers, and attitudinal barriers (or fears and beliefs about people with disabilities). No one should have to face barriers while trying to get help after a sexual assault.

When you go in to see an advocate regarding your sexual assault, you should tell the advocate about accessibility needs that would make the process easier for you. Don't think that you can only tell them about your needs at the beginning of the meeting. If you and the advocate decide on an accommodation plan to help make the meeting work better for you, and it isn't helpful, it is okay to tell them that the plan it isn't helpful and you can make adjustments together.

Think about if it would be helpful for you to have a support person go with you to help communicate your accessibility needs. If you bring a support person, they do not have to stay with you during the entire process. It is helpful to tell your support person (and the advocate) when you will need them, and when you would like the support person to wait for you in another room.

If you identify a need or an accommodation, you should not be required to provide documentation or have to prove your disability. Asking *if* you have a disability is generally a part of the conversation around accommodations.



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An advocate asking you to disclose your specific disability is a violation of your rights and you do not need to disclose.

We understand that you are more than your disability. Your disability is only one part of your multi-faceted identity. Your feelings, beliefs and values are important and cannot be determined just by knowing one aspect of your lived experience.

References:

Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence & Self-Advocate Coalition of Kansas, *Kansas BELIEVE Self-Advocate Toolkit* (2018).
To request a copy: JClark@kcsdv.org

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