Tips for Supporting Survivors with Disabilities

Accessibility, Assistive Tech, & Inclusion Toolkit

This info sheet explores some ideas and tips to support survivors with disabilities as they access supports and programming.

Procne Navigation

Dr. Jewelles Smith is an expert in Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) work, and specializes in advocacy at the intersection of Gender and Disability. You can learn more about Dr. Smith's work on Procne Navigation's site.

Here are some of Dr. Smith's tips for supporting survivors with disabilities:

Mindful use of language about disability

1

Take the survivors' lead about the language they prefer to use- It's okay to ask what kind of language someone prefers

Example: "What kinds of language would you prefer I use about your accessibility needs or disability?"

2

Use accurate and respectful language- we can "call the thing what it is"

Example: "I am working with a survivor who has diabetes and requires access to a fridge to store insulin"

3

Address mistakes or use of harmful language.

Example: If someone used a word that is harmful to people e.g., "crazy", they could say something like "Sorry, I'm trying not to use that word anymore- what I meant was ____"

Building anti-ableist practices for service delivery

1 **Believe survivors when they share their disabilities and needs**

Assuming someone is faking a disability, or asking survivors to "prove" disabilities or needs can be re-traumatizing, and may create barriers to accessing support for survivors with disabilities

2 **Support the empowerment of survivors with disabilities- assume competence**

Survivors with disabilities might be framed as "less competent", which is a misconception rooted in ableism that can be harmful and disempowering.

3 **Honour requests for accommodations**

Honouring requests for accommodations is a core part of accessibility, as well as building safety and trust.

Upholding Survivors' Dignity and Agency

1 **Support respectful environments for survivors with disabilities**

Always request and receive consent before touching survivors' tools and equipment, for example, wheelchairs, tablets, service animals. Give survivors the time they need to communicate

2 **Support mothers and parents with disabilities**

Mothers with disabilities are often framed as less capable of parenting. Anti-violence workers can support mothers by avoiding over-surveilling them, and advocating for their capacity.

3 **Let survivors with disabilities take the lead for how they'd like to be supported**

Survivors with disabilities are the experts in their own experiences

For the full toolkit, visit BCSTH's Accessibility, Assistive Tech, & Inclusion page.

BC Society of Transition Houses

BRITISH COLUMBIA
Supported by the Province of British Columbia