

Students with Disabilities & Neurodiverse Travel Guide

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Philadelphia, PA

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This guide was developed for ACES and is a part of my student with disabilities toolkit for the NBCC Minority Fellowship Project.



ACES Educational Travel Guide

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About the ACES Educational Travel Guide

Hopes for Guide

Olivia, an individual with hearing loss, is honored, proud, and excited to have this opportunity to author this guide. As a student with a disability, she hopes this guide can be a tool that counseling students can use. In 2022, Olivia worked with the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association (ARCA) Accessibility task force to co-author a conference guide for the American Counseling Association New Orleans Conference. Olivia was inspired by this work to continue her advocacy for her community.

Olivia's goal for this guide is to provide travel tips in preparation for the 2025 ACES Philadelphia conference. She hopes this guide will be helpful for students with disabilities. She acknowledges that this is not a one-size-fits-all travel guide but hopes that it can start further conversations about creating an inclusive, community-oriented, and affirmative learning environment for students with disabilities and neurodivergent individuals.

This student-friendly guide was written by students with disabilities in CACREP programs. Olivia and Bavneet hope that this interactive guide can help support students as they prepare to travel to Philadelphia.

Both authors subscribe to identity-first language. Therefore, this language will be used throughout this guide. Additionally, this guide is guided by the frameworks of ACA Ethics (2014), Disability Justice (Berne, 2015), MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016), ACA Advocacy (Toporek & Daniels, 2018), and CACREP (2024),

Authors



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Olivia, a second-generation Filipino-American, is passionate about counseling education. She subscribes to an integrated counseling theory. She is not a one-size-fits-all counselor. She graduated from Jacksonville State University in 2008 and 2011. She credits her master level counseling professors, Drs. Melanie Jo Wallace and Nancy Fox for excelling in the field. As a young counselor, she wanted to be like them. In 2020, she founded Olive Tree Counseling and Wellness, where she provided pro bono services to frontliners. Olivia's counseling experience includes working with substance use disorders, co-occurring disorders, first-generation students, at-risk adolescents, disability, and neurodiversity. Her clients during COVID-19 influenced her to return to school. Her passion was to teach the next generation of counselors what she had learned from professional practice as well as to develop culturally responsive tools for intersectional communities. In 2021, she started her Counseling Education and Supervision Doctoral Program at the University of New Mexico, where she started the UNM Deaf and Hard of Hearing Support group, served on Albuquerque's Mayor Tim Keller American with Disability Council, past secretary of UNM Chi Sigma Iota, past President of JSU Chi Sigma Iota, first Alabama Counseling Association Chi Sigma Iota Liaison, past president of Alabama Association for Addiction and Offenders Counselors, ACES membership committee, CSJ research committee, and is Past President of the New Mexico Counseling Association Counselor for Advocacy and Social Justice. In 2024, she received the Counselor for Social Justice O'Hana award and is the 2024-2025 NBCC MFP Doctoral Fellow. She is on track to graduate from UNM with her doctoral degree in 2026 or 2027. She is co-advised by Dean Kristopher Goodrich and Dr. Sojeong Nam.

Her current teaching practice employs the framework of universal design. Providing multiple means of teaching inspires her as an educator to work towards "access intimacy." "Access Intimacy" is a term coined in 2011 by Mia Mingus, a queer, disabled, and Korean American woman. In Mingus' own words, "Access intimacy has been a lighthouse in the storm of ableism, beckoning me back home to love and reminding me that I never left." To this end, Mingus' words remind her that embracing disability justice is not only a love letter to my community but a reminder that sharing tips and tools from my own personal struggles can be an avenue that can be the lighthouse to build access for students with disabilities. Olivia acknowledges as a counselor, researcher, and educator, she may not get it right 100% of the time, but through an ongoing conversation with her students and listening to her community, she will work towards an accessible learning environment.



Authors

Bavneet K Randhawa (she/ her/ kaur), MA Counseling Student
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As a first-generation, disabled, neurospicy counseling student and disability justice advocate, Bavneet believes that accessibility must be a central consideration, not an afterthought, when designing academic and professional spaces, especially during milestone events like conferences. Her lived experience navigating both physical and cognitive barriers in higher education has shaped her commitment to building environments rooted in care, dignity, and equity.

Bavneet approaches this work with deep gratitude, curiosity, collaboration, and warmth. She is someone who finds joy in small, meaningful moments—handmade gifts, spontaneous laughter, and shared stories over chai. Outside of school, she loves baking, painting, expressive writing, and creating digital art and visual tools that blend creativity with advocacy. She is especially drawn to play therapy, narrative work, and trauma-informed care, and hopes to integrate these modalities into spaces that affirm disability and neurodivergence as valued ways of being, not things to be fixed.

Bavneet serves as Vice President of the Queer Alliance Collective at Saybrook University and is a proud volunteer with The Perseverance Project, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting spinal cord and neuro injury survivors in living fuller, more self-directed lives. Whether she's helping coordinate initiatives, offering peer support, or sharing her story, Bavneet leads with gentleness and intention.

She's also a proud big sister, a lover of creativity, metaphor, and someone who believes in the quiet power of showing up—even when the path feels hard. Her approach is grounded in cultural humility and access intimacy, and she sees honoring access needs as a relational practice—one that affirms the full humanity of every individual.

Through storytelling, resource-building, joyful resistance, and community care, Bavneet is helping reimagine systems that welcome all bodies, minds, and voices.



Authors

Christine Hagion-Rzepka, PhD clinical psychology program Doctoral Student
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Christine Hagion-Rzepka's academic journey began when she started at Cabrillo Community College in a vocational track, after her severe back injury abruptly ended her career as a dancer. While at Cabrillo, she was a writing tutor and a member of Alpha Gamma Sigma, the honor society, through which she became acquainted with Learning Disabilities Association (LDA).

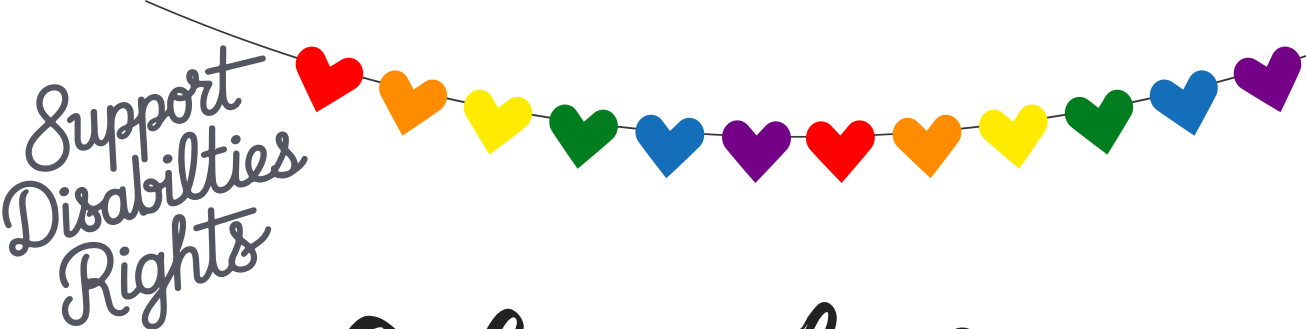
Christine served on the executive board of LDA for 8 years, during which time she advocated for a Cabrillo student with dyscalculia who was unable to pass the Algebra class, a graduation requirement, because of her learning disability. After 2 long years of advocating for this student, Christine was finally successful in getting their Academic Council and Board of Governors to agree to a course substitution so the student could finally graduate and matriculate to a 4-year university to which she had already been accepted. Cabrillo was the first community college in the state to provide this reasonable accommodation for students with learning disabilities (LD), opening a path to higher education that had previously been closed to LD students. Christine credits this experience as her entry into the world of advocacy, and also the first time she acknowledged and became aware of her own disabled identity.

She earned her master's degree in public health at San Jose State University, her alma mater for her baccalaureate, where she graduated cum laude. Christine then founded a nonprofit organization in the San Francisco Bay Area serving hundreds of battered women and their families, which she operated for nearly 15 years.

An ordained minister, Christine entered her first doctoral program in Christian Counseling at Trinity College. As pastoral counselor for 25 years, she returned to graduate school to learn more clinical skills, earning her MA in clinical psychology the very same year that she graduated from seminary.

Shortly after beginning at Saybrook, she founded Awesome Accessibility Advocates (A3), the first student organization at the university for students with disabilities or neurodivergence and their allies. The organization has since changed its name and leadership, but Christine remains a committed and outspoken disability advocate, often giving presentations and publishing to promote equality, inclusion, and acceptance of neurodivergent and disabled individuals, especially in higher education. Read blog posts of how her travel adventures are impacted by accessibility at:

<https://christinehagion.com/f/the-invisible-woman-domestic-travel>
<https://christinehagion.com/f/escapades-on-the-emerald-isle-part-1-international-travel>



Acknowledgements

This guide would not have been possible without the support of a wonderful counseling community. Olivia would like to express her deepest gratitude to her co-advisors, Dr. Kris Goodrich and Dr. Sojeong Nam, for their unwavering guidance in advancing research that affirms and uplifts students with disabilities. She also acknowledges Drs. Hartley, Saia, Pierce, Balva, Stuntzner, Vernado-Johnson, and Elzey for their commitment to increasing culturally responsive care for students with disabilities and for the broader disability and neurodivergent community.

Together, Olivia and Bavneet extend their appreciation to Dr. Alfonso Ferguson and Dr. Seth Rian, whose encouragement and advocacy for Bavneet and others have been a source of strength and inspiration. We are grateful as well for the support of the University of New Mexico and Saybrook University academic communities, which have nurtured this work. A special thank you goes to Christine Hagion-Rzepka for her valuable contribution to this guide.

Olivia also wishes to acknowledge Dr. Christine Sacco-Benne, President of the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association, and Dr. Kelly Duncan, Executive Director of the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision, for their early review and thoughtful feedback. Additionally, we recognize the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) for their support during Olivia's fellowship year, of which this guide is one of the outcomes.

Finally, Olivia offers heartfelt thanks to Dr. Toni Saia. Discovering your story during the first semester of the doctoral program gave her courage and empowerment to continue on this journey.

Alt Pic: Left Picture: Olivia Fadul and Dr. Toni Saia at the New Orleans airport, March 2024.

They had just concluded a conference presentation with Drs. Hartley and Pierce.

True Story: As Olivia stepped out of her Lyft at the airport, she unexpectedly spotted Dr. Toni Saia—an inspiring full-circle moment after presenting together.

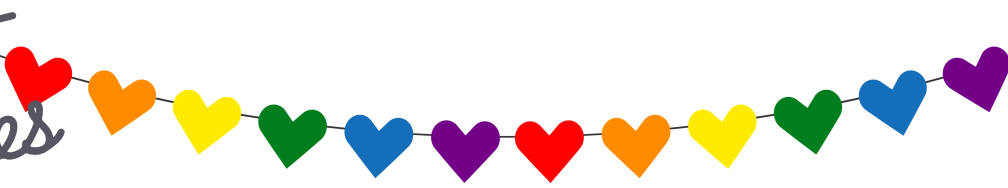


Travel Guide Dedication

Dedicated to Judy Heumann, Mother of Disability Rights and to the members of the ARCA Accessibility Taskforce who introduced me to Judy. Judy influenced the passage of Section 504, IDEA, and American with Disability Act. All of which is vital for the counseling profession to thrive. It is because of disability we have laws to protect our students, clients, and our profession.

As students with disabilities and clinicians, may we strive to put our community and those we serve first.





Disclaimer

We acknowledge that some of this content may be common knowledge to students with disabilities and allies; however, we hope this guide can be an ongoing conversation and one that we can continue to build upon prior knowledge.

In my early career as a counselor, I worked with at-risk adolescents with co-occurring disorders. Many of my clients were part of the neurodivergent community. Much of my knowledge of counseling comes from supporting them and their dreams. One thing I learned from them as well as reflecting on my own journey is the importance of co-creating with community.

Therefore, the content of this guide is from the perspective of disability justice and from the heart of “we are not an island by ourselves.” In other words, we thrive in community.

Cheers!

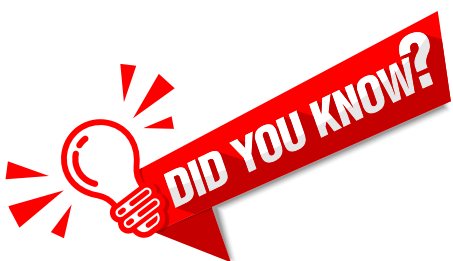
-Olivia



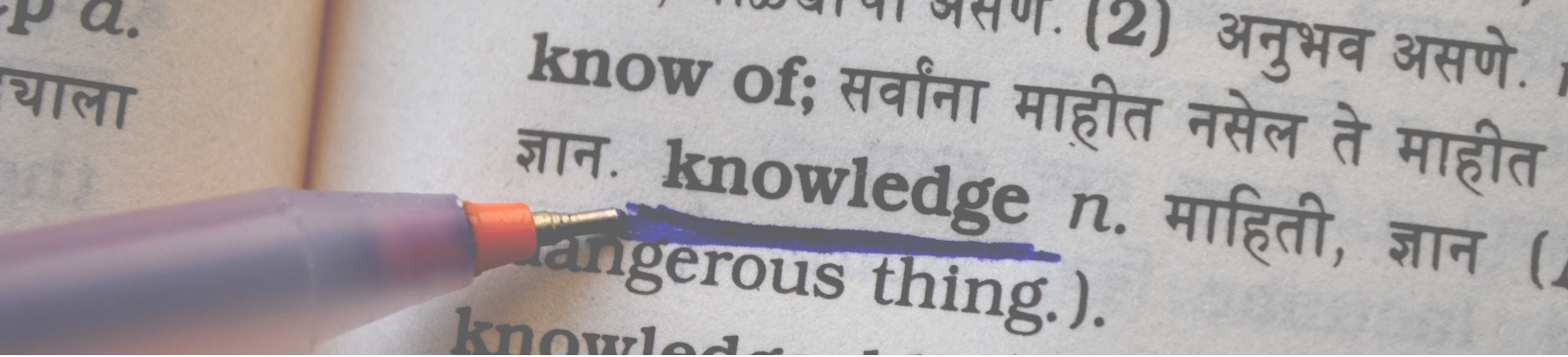


Introduction

Given that there is a lack of research, we propose this travel guide curated for students with disabilities and neurodivergence traveling to the ACES conference. In this travel guide we will use the term “disability and neurodivergent” as an inclusive way to honor students and the definition of the identity they choose. According to Sachet (2024) and Chapman (2020) disability and neurodiversity sometimes overlap. The term disability and neurodivergent is used together. Some neurodivergent identify as disabled while others may not use the word disabled. Therefore, the authors use a disability justice mindset throughout this guide. In other words, these terms are used to honor the cross solidarity of both communities uniting as one and not an island by themselves.



ACES has a Disability Justice and Accessibility (DJAC) in Counseling Interest Network. The DJAC is committed towards centering intersectional and cross-disability experiences, this network welcomes disabled individuals and allies who share the same purpose. If interested in this interest network contact Lynn Pierce or Helen Starkweather for meeting times.



Why this guide

Personal stories about learning needs often carry invisible weight—thoughts like “I know I need this, but...” quickly get buried under the emotional toll and bandwidth required to ask for support. Many of us have moved through conferences thinking, “I’m not worthy to ask for my needs.”

Succinctly, counseling conferences—especially ACES—are vital tools in the learning process for students with disabilities. They are opportunities to engage with current research trends, explore inclusive teaching practices, and connect with mentors, supervisors, and peers.

But the value of a conference depends on access. When students are forced to navigate barriers alone, they miss out not because they aren’t capable—but because the space wasn’t built with them in mind.

As a result of this guide, we hope you walk away not only with tools to advocate for your needs, but with the affirmation that your access matters. You deserve to show up fully, to learn with ease, and to be supported in your professional journey.

Prepping for the Conference

Gentle Tips for Disabled & Neurodivergent Students

✈️ It's more than booking a flight...

Preparing for a counseling conference isn't just about packing and planning. For disabled and neurodivergent students, it's also emotional labor: navigating unfamiliar, often inaccessible spaces, while still trying to learn and belong.

This guide helps ease some of that load—from requesting accommodations to finding calm spaces when things get overwhelming. You are not alone. You are worthy of care, space, and full participation.





Before You Go: Ask for Accommodations

**Once registered, contact
Organizers to request**

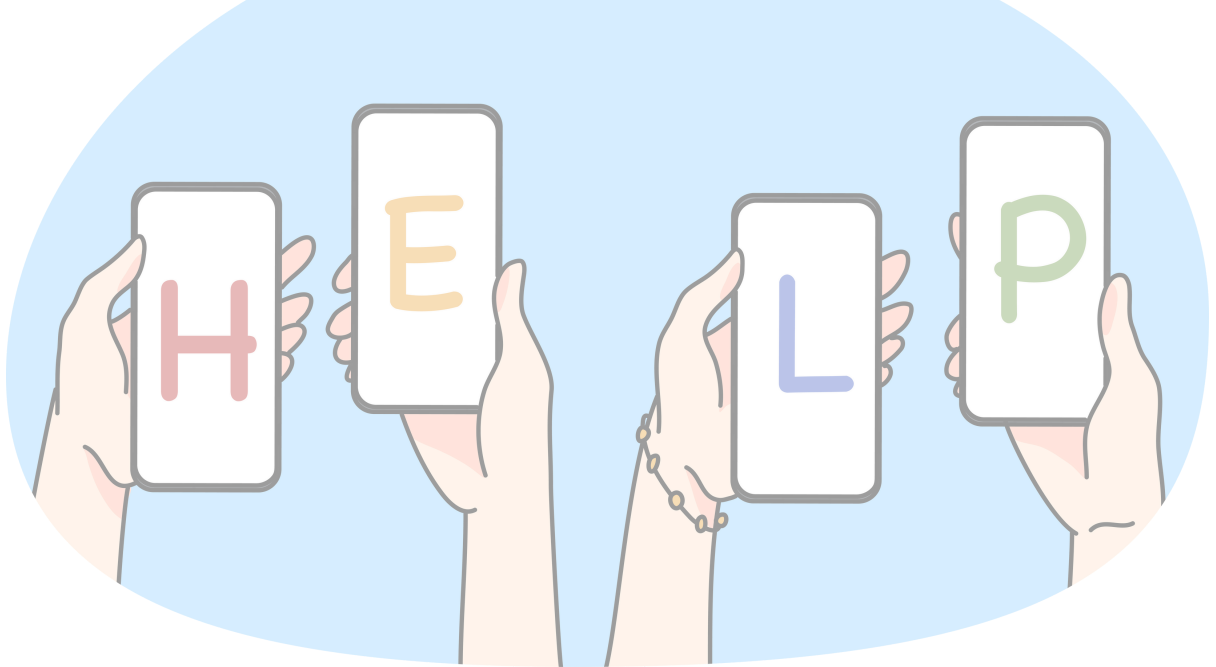
Aces Contact: executivedirector@acesonline.net

Website: <https://acesonline.net/contact-us/>

- Mobility assistance
- Sensory-friendly spaces or rest areas
- ASL interpreters or captioning
- Dietary accommodations
- Accessible bathrooms & seating
- Time buffers between sessions
- Maps of the venue & rest zones
- On-site ADA coordinator or contact person
- Assistance with buffet lines if your disability prevents you from serving yourself

Also, Plan for:

- Hotel accessibility (e.g. roll-in showers, a room with a bathtub or enough space to accommodate a wheelchair, elevator access, in-room refrigeration for medicines that must be chilled)
- Transportation (ADA shuttles, wheelchair taxis, accessible drop-off points)
- Plenty of time to get to the airport and navigate the TSA lines.
- If traveling with a motorized wheelchair, be advised that some airlines require previous permission to be granted for your mobility device (with some requiring 10 days' notice).
- Some airlines may require you to remove the lithium battery on a motorized wheelchair, and to carry it with you inside the cabin of the plane. You can ask for a technician to assist you in returning it to its proper place on your motorized wheelchair or scooter (after your flight lands) if your disability precludes you from doing so yourself.



If Accommodations Are Missing

Even with planning, you may arrive and find gaps. Try the broaching framework (Day-Vine et al., 2007, 2016, 2021). When asking for your needs, you may go to the ACES help desk or find an ACES volunteer:

🧑 "As a neurodivergent person, I'm feeling overwhelmed by the sensory environment..."

! "...and I noticed quiet/rest areas aren't available as expected."

🤝 "Is there someone I can speak to about alternatives or support?"

Conference Packing List

Conference Basics:

- Hidden Disability Lanyard
- Accessibility devices (FM system, cane, etc.)
- Travel itinerary, ID, registration info
- Virtual business cards (Wave, Hi Hello, Blinq, etc.)
- Laptop, chargers, power banks
- Medication (in original prescription bottles)
- Extension cords for other medical devices (heating pads, glucose monitoring devices, CPAP machines, blood pressure cuffs, etc.)

Sensory Toolkit:

- Comfort Items
- Weighted blanket
- Noise-canceling headphones
- Fidget spinners, bubbles
- Aromatherapy sticks (lavender, mint)
- Acupressure mat

Self-Soothers:

- Chewy necklaces
- Liquid timers
- Favorite snacks (dark chocolate, tea)
- Music, nature sounds, ASMR
- Apps: Calm, Happify, Relax Melody
- Affirmation journal
- Coloring book
- Any needed meds



Ethical Duty: Designing with Inclusion in Mind

As clinicians and educators, we have an ethical obligation to ensure that conference spaces are safe, affirming, and accessible to all participants. This isn't just a matter of preference—it's a matter of professional integrity and justice.

Compliance ≠ Access

Just because a venue meets ADA requirements doesn't mean it's truly accessible. Physical and logistical barriers may still exist, affecting autonomy and participation. Accessibility is not a checklist—it's a relational, lived, and evolving commitment to inclusion.

When disabled students can't safely or independently participate, the event is not accessible—regardless of legal compliance.



Recommended Accessible Hotels

Philadelphia Marriott Downtown (ACES Hotel)

1201 Market St / 1200 Filbert St

[Visit Website](#)

☎ (215) 625-2900

Kimpton Hotel Monaco Philadelphia

433 Chestnut St

[Visit Website](#)

☎ (617) 772-5816

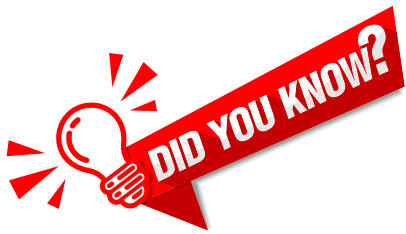
Sofitel Philadelphia at Rittenhouse Square

Accessible and centrally located.

[Visit Website](#)

☎:(833)372-5628

Disability-Affirming Travel in Philly



Philadelphia has a 17% disability rate—one of the highest among large U.S. cities—and is the first officially certified sensory-inclusive city in the U.S. (Spasova, 2023).

Getting Around:

Philadelphia International Airport (PHL) offers:

- Wheelchair assistance
- Priority TSA screening (Sunflower Lanyard Program)
- ADA-compliant signage and restrooms

Finding Sensory Friendly Places:

Sometimes as individuals we need, crave, or want quiet spaces to converse. This helps to improve our quality of life. If you are like me, I love quiet coffee shops, gardens, museums, orchestra, and restaurants where I can pay close attention to my conversation partners. Below I've included an app, gardens, and a list of quiet places you can go to with your colleagues.

Quiet Restaurant App Finder:



Soundprint is an app available on apple and google phones. This app helps you to find quiet restaurants.

List of City of Philadelphia Accessible Locations

- [*Recommended Accessible places click here*](#)
- [*Visit Comcast Sensory zone in downtown. Click here.*](#)

Travel Tips!

#1: Get a Sunshine Lanyard if you have an invisible disability

What is a Sunshine Lanyard?

The Sunshine lanyard is a lanyard you can use to voluntarily disclose that you have a disability that is not apparent and that you may need additional support.

How do I obtain a Sunshine Lanyard?

The Sunshine Lanyard can be obtained at a help desk at the airport. You may also visit the sunshine website to obtain a lanyard-

Website: <https://hdsunflower.com/us/shop.html>



Alt Text: Olivia at TSA Line for physical and invisible disabilities. at the Orlando Airport ACA 2025 conference.

#2: *When traveling with disability, ask if there is a TSA line for disabilities. You can also enroll in the Pre-TSA program.*

Olivia's insight: When traveling with hearing loss, I found asking a person at the airport if there was a TSA line for individuals with disabilities helpful. I felt less overwhelmed, and the airline folks were supportive when navigating the TSA line.

#3: *If you have a mobility issue, or need help carrying your luggage, ask for assistance from staff of your airline.*

Christine's insight: A year before obtaining my own motorized wheelchair, I was stressed at the airport when I learned my gate was very, very far away from TSA, and I knew I could not walk that distance by myself. I was very grateful (and relieved!) when a staff member astutely noticed my struggle and called someone from my airline to bring a wheelchair to my location and to push me to the gate

Travel Tips!



#3: Once at the gate, check in with the airline help desk. Make sure they know you are pre-boarding.

Olivia's Insight: As a student with a disability who travels to conferences, I often travel alone.

One thing I do to ensure I make my flight is to let the airline people know that I have hearing loss and have difficulties hearing the announcements. Once I tell them this, they give me a chance to pre-board. This is nice because it cuts down my hearing loss anxiety.

Olivia Travel Strategies:

- Have a self-soothing routine.
- Think of your favorite nature scene. Mine is imagining crashing waves or a waterfall. To self-soothe or ground myself, I interlock my hands and put them over my stomach. This reminds me that each breath I breathe matters. Sometimes I put my hand over my heart and feel the beat of my heart.

Conference Allyship Toolkit

For Organizers, Faculty, and Mentors

You care about creating meaningful experiences for students—and we're grateful. This toolkit is here to support you in ensuring those experiences are inclusive, accessible, and affirming for disabled and neurodivergent participants.

Gentle Reminder: Please remember that access isn't an afterthought—it's a commitment to equity and care.

Why This Matters

When access needs go unmet—whether it's the absence of ramps, sensory-friendly spaces, live captioning, or inclusive seating—it's not just inconvenient; it's isolating.

Students may feel:

- ✗ Invisible
- ✗ Overwhelmed
- ✗ Unwelcome

Instead of focusing solely on a growth mindset and learning, energy is redirected toward navigating barriers. For students already facing marginalization, this can turn a promising opportunity into a painful one. Access communicates who belongs. Engaging in this conversation says, “I see you,” “I love you,” “You matter to me.” This tone is much appreciated and opens the door to access intimacy.

Conference Allyship Toolkit

How to Offer Support Without Overstepping

Sometimes offering help can feel awkward: What if I say the wrong thing? What if they don't want help?

Here are ways to offer support respectfully:

- ✓ “Would it be helpful if I... [grabbed food for you / opened the door for you / found a quiet corner / shared my notes]?”
- ✓ “I’m here if you want company or backup. No pressure either way.”
- ✓ “Is there a way I can make this easier for you?”
- ✓ “Let me know if it would feel good to tag out together after the next session.”

And here’s what not to do:

- ✗ Don’t assume someone needs help just because of how they look.
- ✗ Don’t push advice without consent (e.g., “You should try XYZ”).
- ✗ Don’t take offense if someone says “no”—offering support is about consent, not control.
- ✗ Don’t assume that someone is angry because of the look on their face. They may just be in pain. Instead, ask in a sensitive way.

Allies: How to Show Up Gently

If you’re an ally or non-disabled peer, your role isn’t to fix—your role is to listen, notice, and ask. The most meaningful moments of support often come from people who simply say, “I see you.”

You can:

- Offer a ride or elevator buddy
- Normalize breaks and rest
- Ask about their access needs

Speak up when accessibility is being overlooked, even if it doesn’t affect you directly. Be a co-advocate when needed—but let the disabled person lead.

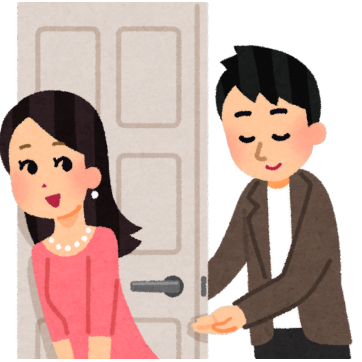
Final Thought:

Everyone benefits from access. Buddy systems are not about charity—they’re about community care. We’re not meant to “power through” these spaces alone.

“Being supported should never feel like a privilege. It should feel like a given.” — Saybrook Student

Door Openers

Start Here: Simple but Powerful Check-Ins



Before and during the event, ask:

“How are you feeling about attending this event?”

“Is there anything I can do to support your access or comfort?”

“What would help you feel more included or prepared?”

✓ These small moments build trust and ease anxiety.

✓ You don’t need all the answers—just a willingness to listen.

"It took the pressure off of me to start those sometimes hard conversations."

– *Barneet, Master Level Counseling Student*

Inclusive Presenting Tips:

Use live captioning or auto-captioned slides

✓ Use a microphone when presenting so all attendees can hear, not just the ones in the front rows

✓ Offer inclusive seating near aisles/entrances

✓ Create sensory-friendly environments (e.g., soft lighting, low noise)

✓ Use simple slides: large fonts, low-clutter visuals, no autoplay audio

✗ Avoid complex patterns or flashing effects (these can trigger seizures in people with epilepsy)

Student Toolkit:

Getting My Learning Needs Met...

We acknowledge that everyone's needs are different.

Olivia Insight: One thing I have learned is how as I continue to learn my needs I figure out what works and what doesn't work. If something does not work I have learned how to be gentle with self and how to readjust.

Below are student-informed tips:

Tip 1: For Neurodivergent Learners

Challenges:

Sensory overload, unpredictable schedules, social fatigue

Strategies:

- Pack a sensory toolkit (headphones, fidgets, snacks)
- Use assistive apps (Notion, OneNote)
- Schedule downtime or breaks
- Connect with community



Resources:

Neurodiversity Hub: Offers resources for neurodivergent students, including planning tools and support networks.

Therapist Neurodiversity Collective: Provides free neurodiversity-affirming materials and guidance.

ACES Disability Justice and Accessibility Interest Network: Centered on disability Cross solidarity amongst counselor educators, students, counselors, and supervisors to promote culturally responsive spaces within counseling education

American Rehabilitation Counseling Association: Offers disability resources promoting culturally responsive care for individuals with disabilities. (e.g, rehabilitation counselors, clinical mental health, school counselors, supervisors, private practitioners, counselor education).



Tip 2: Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Students

Challenges:

- Lack of interpreters, captioning, or assistive listening devices

Strategies:

- Request interpreters/captions early
- Use apps like Otter.ai or Fireflies.ai
- Sit near the front for visibility and access to lip read or hear. Avoid the back of the room or sitting by the door.
- Ask your campus accessibility resource center for an FM microphone prior to coming to the conference. If this is not available some most states have an office where you can check out accessibility equipment.
- Pre-request seating preferences

Resources:

National Deaf Center: Offers comprehensive resources for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Hands & Voices: A parent-driven organization supporting families with children who are deaf or hard of hearing

Tip 3: Blind, Low Vision



Challenges:

- Unfamiliar venues, inaccessible visuals

Strategies:

- Ask for large print or screen-reader-friendly materials
- Request venue orientation/maps in advance
- Bring or request assistive tech (braille displays, screen readers)

Resources

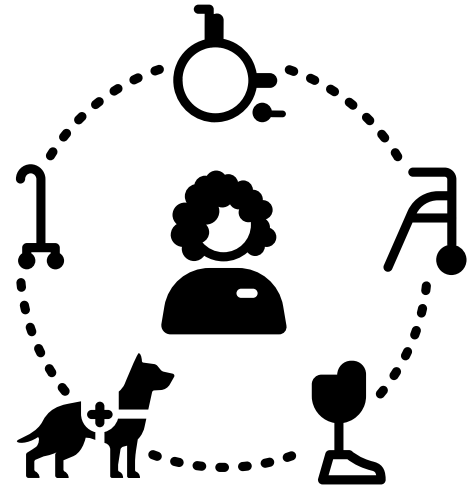
American Council of the Blind: Provides resources and support for individuals with low vision.

Paths to Literacy: Offers literacy resources for individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Tip 4: Physical Accessibility

Challenges:

- Inaccessible venues, long distances, and few breaks
- Lack of seating/rest areas in hallways.
- Heavy doors without automatic openers.
- Limited elevators or long waits.



Strategies:

- Research venue layout (entrances, elevators)
- Ask about wheelchair/scooter availability
- Build in rest time between sessions
- Save energy: Plan downtime between sessions, use mobility aids as needed, and consider a buddy for navigation.
- Sit strategically: Request accessible seating near aisles, exits, or close to the presenter.

Resources

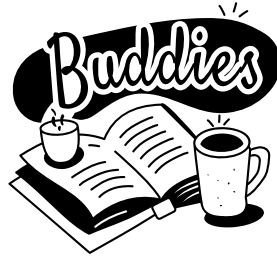
[Accessible Event Planning Guide](https://arcaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ARCA-Accessibility-Report-March-2023.pdf): The first counseling conference accessibility guide in counseling. This was created for the 2023 American Counseling Association New Orleans conference. Offers comprehensive guidelines for creating accessible events. Website: <https://arcaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ARCA-Accessibility-Report-March-2023.pdf>

Additional Resources

Education USA: Resources for Students with Disabilities: Offers information for international students with disabilities.

National Association of the Deaf: Provides a wide range of resources for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

Tip 5: Find a buddy at the conference



Challenges:

- Getting lost or disoriented in large, busy conference venues.
- Missing key information due to noise, fast-paced lectures, or fatigue.
- Feeling isolated or overlooked in networking spaces.
- Needing to leave early from a session due to sensory overload, pain, or medical needs.
- Difficulty self-advocating when accessibility isn't automatically provided.

What is a Buddy System?

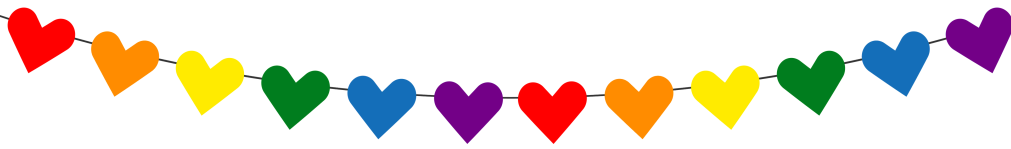
A buddy system is a low-pressure, mutual agreement between two or more people to check in before, during, and after an event, especially when navigating accessibility needs, emotional regulation, or energy pacing.

Strategies:

- Plan together: Meet each morning to review sessions and logistics.
- Divide & share notes: Attend different sessions, then exchange key points.
- Set check-in signals: Have a text, hand signal, or phrase if you need a break.
- Use accessibility features: Request reserved seating, captions, or assistive listening devices in advance.
- Role-play advocacy: Practice quick scripts together for requesting help or access.

Buddy Tips

- Discuss needs early: Let your buddy know if you need slower walking pace, captioned sessions, or reserved seating.
- Stay connected: Exchange phone numbers or conference app contacts.
- Be flexible: Some days you may need more support, other days less.
- Mutual support: Remember—you can also be a buddy back!
- Leisurely Plans: We all want to be included—this is a basic human need. Remember not to leave your buddy out. When meeting with a group, post plans ahead of time so everyone can prepare. Avoid changing plans at the last minute, but if changes are necessary, be considerate and inclusive by letting your buddy—and the whole group—know in advance.



Thank You

To every student, educator, mentor, and ally reading this—thank you. Your time, presence, and willingness to learn alongside us mean more than words can say.

This guide was created with care, reflection, and community insight. While we know it cannot cover every experience or meet every need, we hope it offers a foundation—one rooted in access, dignity, and belonging.

Let this be a beginning, not an end.

A beginning to more accessible conferences.

A beginning to deeper conversations.

A beginning to reimagining spaces where all bodies and minds are welcomed and celebrated.

We are so grateful you're here with us on this journey.

We hope you enjoy the ACES conference.

With care,
Olivia, Bavneet, & Christine



Happy Travels

Free Gifts

Spotify Travel Playlists

Disability Affirming Music Artists and
affirming sounds

Scan QR Code or Click on Link below
QR Box



Scan me

ACES Playlist

Link:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/1FIqUTvEXqOsXAevSMjknv?si=H0cOVN7SkKtYxXl1s6B.Nw>



Scan me

Sensory Soothing Playlist

Link:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/7cUhdNnUsMebi21msTmPQ?si=u4fHP5D9RTGx79.Nf6wXbCA>



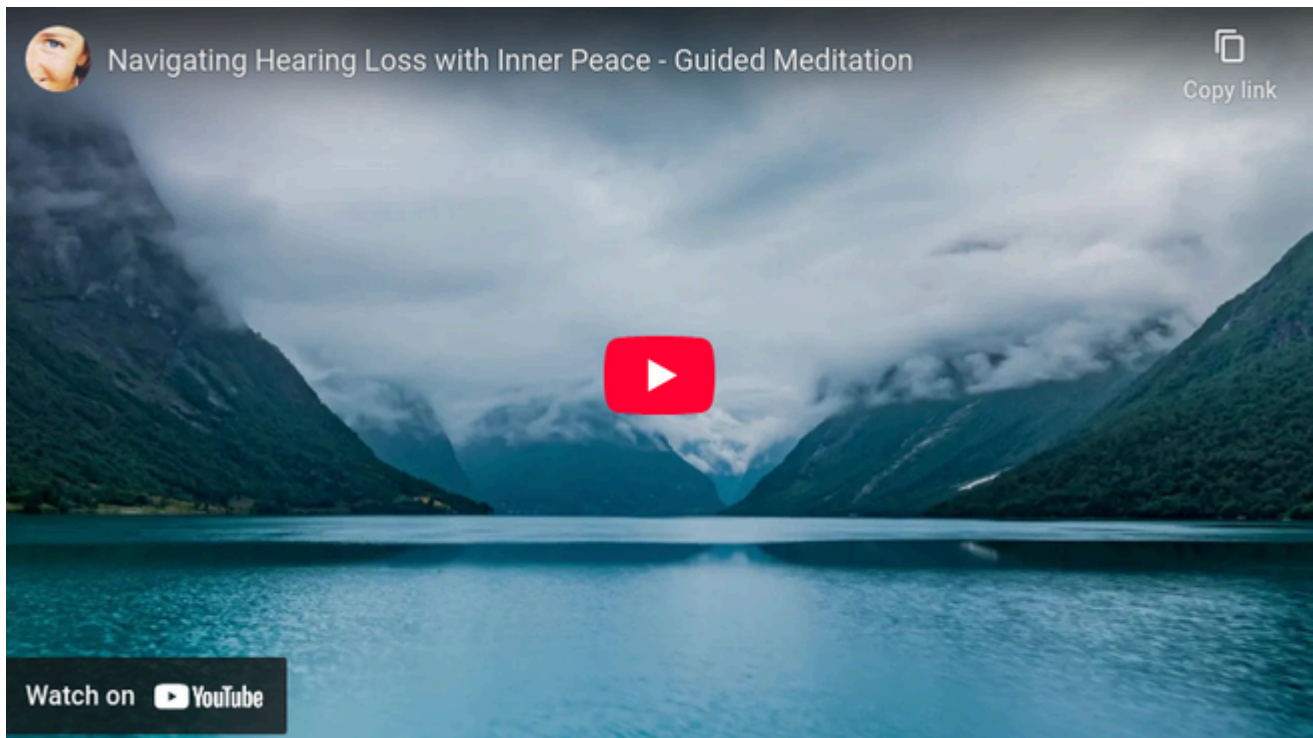
Happy Travels

Free Gifts

Youtube Meditation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Courtesy of Shari Ebert:

<https://livingwithhearingloss.com/2025/06/24/guided-meditation-for-people-with-hearing-loss/>





Happy Travels

Disability Justice Learning Kit

- Understanding the impact of disability culture to support disability justice (Pierce, 2024)
- Embracing Disability in Counseling Education (Fadul & Pierce, 2023)
- Shift to Identity First Language (Saia, 2024).
- A New Approach for Persons with Disability (Stuntzner & Hartley, 2015).