



Communicating Access: An Interactive Paper Plane Resource to Support Students with Disabilities

Written by Zoe Collins, Spiramind

In Partnership with the National Organization for Victim Advocacy (NOVA)





Introduction

In 2023, the National Organization for Victim Advocacy’s Training and Technical Assistance (TTA) team and consortium partner, Activating Change, facilitated four virtual listening sessions with 48 college students with disabilities. Each listening session explored concepts related to the needs of Students with Disabilities around prevention and response efforts related to Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault, and Stalking (DVSAS). Students expressed a need for increasing victim support services for students with disabilities, and supporting professionals working with students to better communicate around access.

As a response to the needs expressed by students, NOVA consulted with Zoe Collins of Spiramind to create a resource to support campus-based professionals in increasing access through an interactive communication tool: “The Accessibility Airplane”.

Accessibility Airplane

The Accessibility Airplane is a fun, hands-on way to engage students with disabilities in a conversation about accommodations. This 3D tool is an interactive metaphor for the collaboration that is necessary to meet disabled student-survivors’ needs. Every human being is unique, and their needs are too. Continue reading to learn more about Disability Justice and how to incorporate this tool to effectively engage disabled student-survivors.





Working With Disabled Student-Survivors

Disability is an umbrella term which includes a vast spectrum of experiences. Disability means something different to every disabled person, so it can be hard to define. Generally, a disability is any physical or mental experience that creates daily challenges for a person navigating life within a culture that prioritizes people without disabilities. There is no list of conditions that “count” as disabilities, and decisions about who is/isn't disabled can be closely linked to overlapping systemic oppression. If a student has a physical, health, mental health, sensory, or neurocognitive condition, they are likely entitled to accommodations. Everyone benefits from efforts to adapt policies and procedures to be more inclusive.

A person’s disability related needs are called “access needs” or “support needs.” Some students with disabilities may know exactly what they need in order to participate meaningfully in services - an accommodation. Many people, regardless of disability status, can struggle to identify their needs and ask for support. Student-survivors of DVSAAS may have pre-existing disabilities, and they may also be adjusting to new symptoms as a result of recent trauma (like PTSD or a brain injury).

Disabilities are much more common than most of us realize, and many people might not know that their experiences fit within the legal and cultural definitions of disability. Due to systemic ableism, not every disabled person will have a diagnosis, and not every student with a disability will want to disclose their disability to the school.





It is important to keep an open mind when listening to students' experiences, and to remember that providing accessible services must not depend on a diagnosis, or on a student's participation with the school's office of disabilities. Any provider can open the conversation to implement accommodations, though if a student wants to, including the disability office can be helpful. Flexibility and honesty are the keys to resilient, empowered working relationships with disabled student-survivors.

How to use the Accessibility Airplane

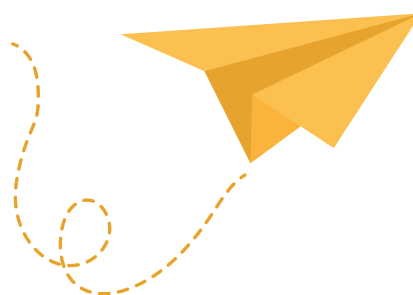
A simple conversation about "access needs" will lay the foundation for a student to be their most authentic self throughout your work together.

Getting Started

Print the double-sided paper airplane template at the end of this resource guide and follow the next seven steps to fold the Accessibility Airplane.

Print the template full size at 100%. Some of the lines will run off the page - this is normal. This minimizes excess edges and makes the airplane easier to fold. Before you begin, if there is still a white border, crease the paper in half length-wise, along #5. If any lines look weird from printing, use that center crease as a guide for all folds

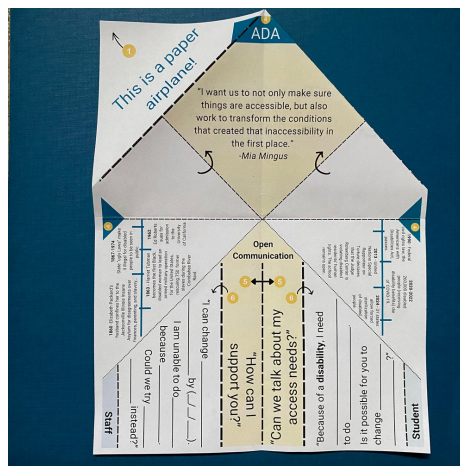
Pre-fold one copy as an example, and work together with the student to fold their own airplane to keep. Revisit the airplane often with the student to make sure that your accommodation plan is still working well. There is no right or wrong way to use this tool, so get creative!



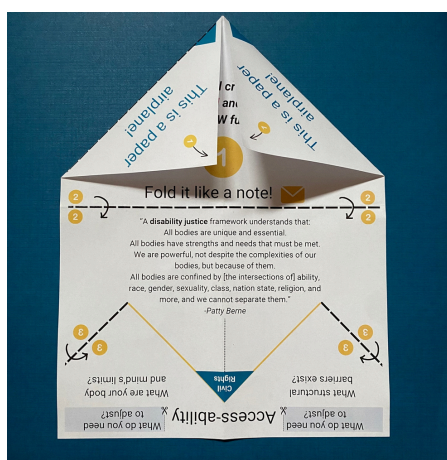


Step One

Fold the top corners down, creating a point, labeled “ADA.” The text below reads: “I want us to not only make sure things are accessible, but also work to transform the conditions that created that inaccessibility in the first place. - Mia Mingus”



Step Two



Flip the paper over. The text reads “The disability justice framework understands that: All bodies are unique and essential. All bodies have strengths and needs that must be met. We are powerful, not despite the complexities of our bodies, but because of them. All bodies are confined by [the intersections of] ability, race, gender, sexuality, class, nation state, religion, and more, and we cannot separate them. -Patty Berne.”



Fold along the horizontal dotted line, which says “Fold it like a note!” so that the blue tip of the diamond (ADA) lines up with the blue triangle that says “civil rights.”

The paper will look like an envelope with a pointed flap.



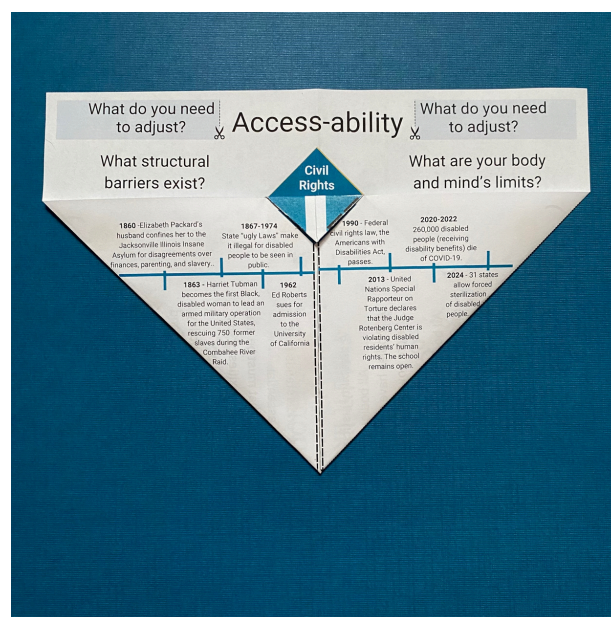
Step Three

Rotate the airplane to read the text. The heading is “Access-ability.” One side represents structural access, and the other represents the student-survivor’s abilities. Pause to reflect together on the pair of questions at the top: “What structural barriers exist?” and “what are your body and mind’s limits?” Fold the new lower corners up to meet in the center.



Step Four

The lower section forms a simple timeline of a few key disability justice and DVSA events. Fold the small blue triangle down over the two flaps to reveal the text: “civil rights,” pointing at the year 1990, when the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. This tab secures the core of the accessibility airplane, just like civil rights are the core of an institution’s responsibility to be accessible to people with disabilities. Civil rights are the tip of the Disability Justice iceberg.





Step Four Timeline

1860 - Elizabeth Packard's husband confines her to the Jacksonville Illinois Insane Asylum for disagreements over finances, parenting, and slavery.

1863 - Harriet Tubman becomes the first Black, disabled woman to lead an armed military operation in the US, rescuing 750 former slaves in the Combahee River Raid.

1867-1974 - State "ugly Laws" make it illegal for disabled people to be seen in public.

1962 - Ed Roberts sues for admission to the University of California.

1990 - Federal civil rights law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, passes.

2013 - United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture declares that the Judge Rotenberg Center is violating disabled residents' human rights. The school remains open.

2020-2022 - 260,000 disabled people (receiving disability benefits) die of COVID-19

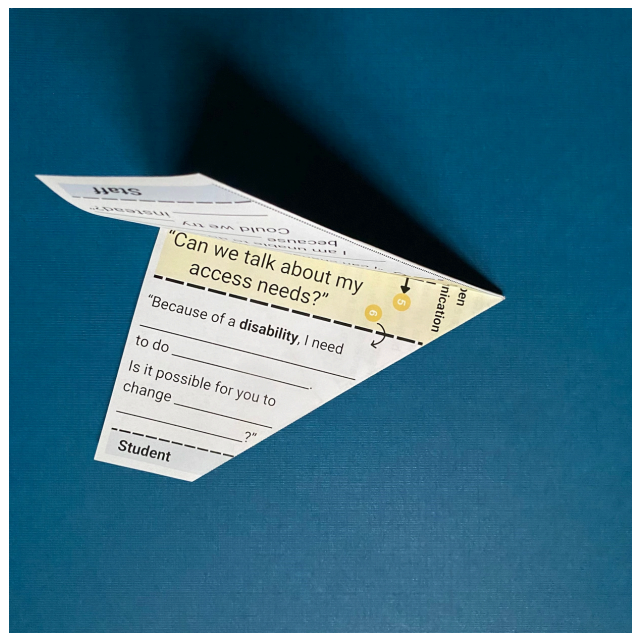
2024 - 31 states allow forced sterilization of disabled people.





Step Five

Flip the airplane over and fold it in half. Unfold it. Orient the left side towards the person with power to grant/deny accommodation requests (staff), and the right side towards the student. The central yellow column represents open communication, with a sample script for how either party can begin a conversation about access needs. A student could say “can we talk about my access needs?” and a provider could say “how can I support you?”



Step Six

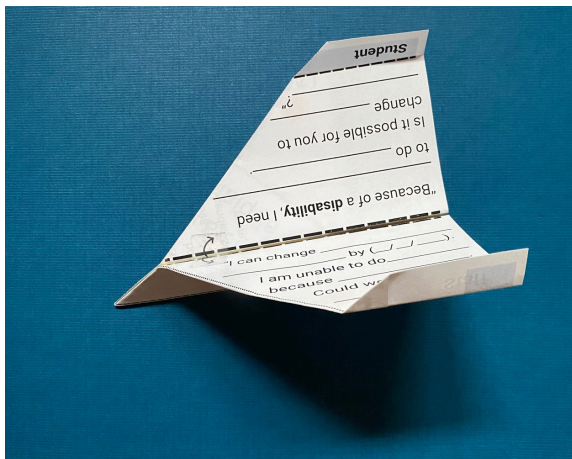
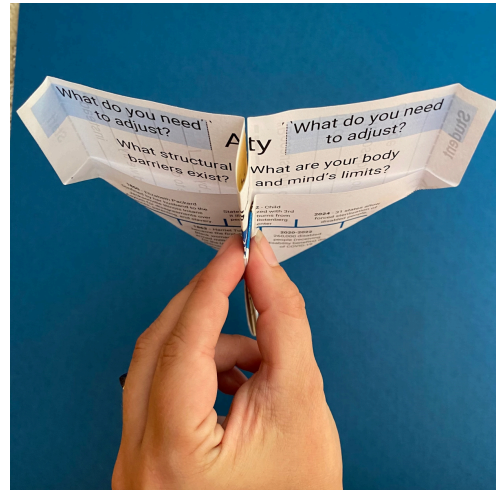
Crease the wings of the airplane on each side. The student’s wing reads “Because of a disability, I need _____ to do _____. Is it possible for you to change _____?” The provider’s wing reads “I can change _____ by (/ /). I am unable to do _____ because _____. Could we try _____ instead?” Use this script to guide your conversation about reasonable accommodations until you find a mutually agreed on way to increase the student’s ability to access your services.





Step Seven

Grip the blue triangle under the airplane and throw! Notice that flight requires both wings to come together, and the power of every disabled activist who came before you. Fasten the wings together with a small piece of tape, crease the tips of each wing, and throw again.



BONUS STEP: Accommodations are exactly like paper airplanes... we rarely achieve perfection on the first try! On the light blue boxes that say “What do you need to adjust?” make a small cut with scissors on each wing to fine-tune your airplane. This represents all the small changes necessary to create a good accommodation. Make a plan to check in regularly with the student-survivor about how the accommodation is working. Because nobody’s needs are exactly the same, try creating your own Accessibility Airplane! Work together with the student-survivor to come up with the best paper airplane design, and write out a personalized accommodation plan on the wings and body. The sky’s the limit!



Additional Resources to Further Your Learning

Job Accommodation Network: <https://askjan.org/a-to-z.cfm>

JAN provides free, confidential technical assistance about job accommodations and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

(800) 526-7234 (Voice) | (877) 781-9403 (TTY)

National Center for College Students with Disabilities: <https://nccsd.ici.umn.edu>
nccsd@ahead.org

Phone: (888)-730-8048 | Video Phone (651)-583-7499

Find your local Center for Independent Living: <https://acl.gov/programs/centers-independent-living/list-cils-and-spils>

ADAPT: <https://adapt.org>

American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today DEFENDS OUR FREEDOM to live in our homes, not nursing homes!



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Connecting with Spiramind



720-837-2238



zoe.collins@spiramind.com



www.spiramind.com



Connecting with NOVA



CampusTA@trynova.org

NOVA National Organization
for Victim Advocacy



www.trynova.org/campus-advocacy/



Page
Left
Intentionally
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This is a paper airplane!

This is a paper airplane!

4 ADA

"I want us to not only make sure things are accessible, but also work to transform the conditions that created that inaccessibility in the first place."
-Mia Mingus

Open Communication

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Staff

Student

"I can change _____ by (____/____/____).
I am unable to do _____ because _____.
Could we try _____ instead?"

"How can I support you?"

"Can we talk about my access needs?"

"Because of a disability, I need _____ it possible for you to change _____?"

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_____ change

_____ ?

1

1

4

4

5

5

6

6

*"This tool created by
Spiramind and NOVA
with OVW funding"*



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"A **disability justice** framework understands that:
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race, gender, sexuality, class, nation state, religion, and
more, and we cannot separate them."

-Patty Berne

Civil
Rights

What are your body
and mind's limits?

What structural
barriers exist?

What do you need
to adjust?

Access-ability

What do you need
to adjust?

1

1

2

2

2

2

3

3

3

3