

Community Accessibility Checklist

BIG IDEA

In the film *Superhuman Body*, engineers work with medical devices and new technology to improve people's lives.

KEY TERMS



Vocabulary is very important for this activity. Use terms that the disabled community prefers and avoid words that have a negative history or connotation. [Here is a good resource for language to use and avoid.](#)

SAY THIS ...

- Accessible
- Disability
- People without a disability, able-bodied

NOT THAT ...

- Handicapped
- Differently-abled, special needs
- Normal, healthy

In 1990 the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law by President George H.W. Bush, but even prior to that, people with disabilities had been working for decades to make their communities safer and more accessible. In addition to providing civil rights protections for people with disabilities, the law also provides people with guidelines about accessible design for public spaces and businesses.

MATERIALS

- Checklist
- Writing pad and pencil
- Tape measure
- Digital camera or phone



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ACTIVITY

In this activity, participants should work together to walk through spaces in their community, whether that is their school, their library, a local park, or a main street or business district, and make observations about how easy it is for people of all abilities to move through the space. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, but rather a tool to help participants start to think about how design decisions affect people in their community who might have a disability.

Since this activity suggests that the participants go out into the community, please exercise caution. Do not go into or onto private property and obey safety and traffic laws. Children should be accompanied by an adult.



Ramps: Accessible ramps are great for helping people with mobility issues access places that primarily have stairs.

Width of passageways: There are different regulations for door width depending on the door, but generally a doorway must be 32 inches wide to be considered accessible. If a door was any narrower, a person in a wheelchair would likely be unable to enter. Aisles in a grocery store also need to be at least 36 inches wide to be compliant with ADA standards.



Doors: Public spaces should have doors that can be opened with one hand and require no twisting of the wrist or tight grasping. Look for buttons to open doors automatically.

Obstructions: Look out for objects jutting out from the walls. People who have low vision often use the wall as a way to navigate a new space, and things that stick out at head level or lower could injure a person.



Railings: Look for places that could use railings to help someone maintain their balance. Look for where the railings are placed, and think about their height, and how they are secured.

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With these concepts in mind, explore your community and use some of the following questions to help you assess the accessibility of your neighborhood:

PARKS AND PLAYGROUND

- Do playgrounds have a smooth, shock-absorbent surface?
- Does play equipment allow kids to play together regardless of their ability? (an accessible swing, ramps)
- Are there tactile and sensory options available for kids? (ways to play that make noise or allow kids to touch different parts of the playground safely)
- Are paths wide and flat enough to allow people in wheelchairs to move through the area?

OUTSIDE SCHOOLS, LIBRARIES, AND BUSINESSES

- Is there at least one parking space close to the entrance reserved for people with disabilities?
- Is there a clearly marked drop-off/pick-up zone with a flat, grippy surface?
- Can the entrance to the facility be reached using a ramp rather than stairs?
- Can doors be opened by pushing a button?

INSIDE SCHOOLS, LIBRARIES, AND BUSINESSES

- Does the space have adjustable desks and a mix of chairs with and without arms?
- Are signs easy to read, with large font and/or Braille?
- If the building has more than one floor, is there an elevator?
- Are there any objects (fire extinguishers, fountains) that stick out into walking paths?
- Does the elevator include Braille signage and audio to announce the floor?
- Is at least one stall in each restroom accessible for people who use wheelchairs?
- Are there rails or handles inside the stall?
- Are there automatic faucets, hand dryers, and paper towel dispensers?
- Are there lower height sinks and counters?
- Do stairs have colorful markings with grooves or rough textures so you can feel where each stair ends?
- Do fire evacuation signs use visual flashing lights in addition to loud noises?

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DIG DEEPER

One way to approach the design of accessible spaces in the community is to think about Universal Design. The principle of **Universal Design** is to create spaces that serve everyone as equally as possible. An entrance with a properly designed ramp can serve both able-bodied individuals as well as people with disabilities and allow them to use the same entrance.

The following seven principles were developed by

THE CENTER FOR UNIVERSAL DESIGN AT NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY

- 1. Equitable use** — Can be used by different people with different needs
- 2. Flexibility in use** — Accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities
- 3. Simple and intuitive** — Use is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level
- 4. Perceptible information** — Communicates necessary information effectively, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities
- 5. Tolerance for error** — Minimizes hazards and adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions
- 6. Low physical effort** — Can be used efficiently, comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue
- 7. Size and space for approach and use** — Appropriate size and space are allotted regardless of user's physical characteristics

WHAT'S THE SCIENCE?

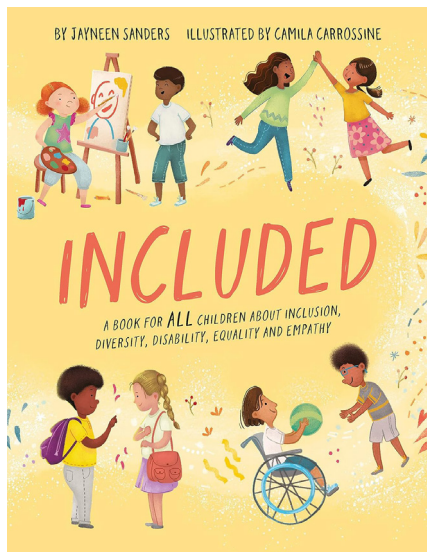
Communities have a duty to serve the people who live there. This practice not only attracts new people into places but also makes everyone who lives there happier. It is also important to know that disabilities are not all visible, or something that a person is born with. These changes can help people:

- Recovering from injuries.
- Receiving medical treatment or experiencing chronic illness.
- With mobility issues.
- Caregivers using strollers or trying to corral small children.
- Shoppers with their arms full.

Anyone falling into these categories understands how beneficial it is to have accessible spaces.

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ADDITIONAL LEARNING



READ

Included: A Book for ALL Children about Inclusion, Diversity, Disability, Equality and Empathy by Jayneen Sanders aims to convey that children with disabilities are no different from kids everywhere. Just like their peers, they desire safety, love, and inclusion. The book offers insights on fostering inclusivity in play and promotes the celebration of diversity in its unique and wonderful expressions.



[“Universal Design of Physical Spaces”](#)

from The Center for Universal Design in Education is a deep dive into the practice of Universal Design in both practical and technical terms.

The information collected here applies both to physical spaces, but also events and programs we may design.



WATCH

[“Why Is Accessible Design Good for Everyone?”](#) by ARTiculations

This video illuminates the ways in which design decisions impact people both with and without disabilities. This video focuses on interior design, but the ideas can be applied to numerous practices.



[“Accessible VS Universal Design - How you can help!”](#)

In this video, the host who is blind discusses the difference between Accessible Design and Universal Design.

DO

Do you notice any items within your community from the checklist above that need to be changed or improved upon? Ask an adult to help you contact your local community leaders. Local leaders and business owners have a responsibility to make changes that serve all members of the community.

Families should take concerns to local code enforcers as well as zoning and planning boards.

SOURCES CITED

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NC State University. (n.d.). The Principles of Universal Design. Center for Universal Design. <https://design.ncsu.edu/research/center-for-universal-design/>