



Things to Think About!



By Brandan Atkin

SNRP Site Link Requirements

Want to have your organization listed on our Resource Links page? SNRP does take submissions for Resource Links on the Resource Links pages. Organizations must be nonprofits and disability related. NO For Profit Businesses or Law Firms, please.

“[Contact Us](#)” then e-mail the information below and we’ll get it posted!

- A. Name of organization/site
- B. Best category for the organization
- C. Contact information as appropriate (Address, phone numbers, fax, etc.)
- D. Web link
- E. Email address for public contact
- F. Short description of program/services offered

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Sensitivity Activity

By Linda Jorgensen

One of our favorite things to do when talking to student groups about disabilities and accessibility is a sensitivity activity. Nothing illustrates challenges better than placing individuals right in the middle of the “problem spots”. Helping individuals get a small taste of the difficulties others often go through to navigate a building, campus, attend a church service, play outside or even navigate the great outdoors helps them understand their role as designers, helpers and advocates a little better.

We especially enjoy doing this with architectural design students. These are the up and coming designers of the spaces we use and live in so who better to train in accessibility principles than the ones responsible for building our buildings and designing our spaces?

A report regarding one of our more enjoyable university activities can be found here: [http://www.snrproject.com/downloads/newsletter/v5n1-Accessibility in Architecture.pdf](http://www.snrproject.com/downloads/newsletter/v5n1-Accessibility%20in%20Architecture.pdf)

Sensitivity activities, in general, can be tailored to fit the group you’re working with. For general purposes we’ll use the instructions for a church group of older teens we recently worked with but we’ve also used this same exercise with university students, younger children and older adults. Simply tailor the activity to the environment and the age group you are working with.

Begin by gathering your supplies and planning a small buffet style meal. This activity does require a few props.

1. Borrow a couple of wheelchairs. You can ask around and find someone with an old wheelchair you could borrow. You’d be amazed at how many folks have Grandma’s old K1 model sitting around. Or contact a local medical supply vendor and ask about an old “beater” chair. Explain what you are doing and ask to use one or two older chairs for an evening. They may let you borrow an old one (or two) at no charge if you explain what you’re doing.
2. Blindfolds
3. Ear plugs with a head set over the top (deafness)
4. Socks for hands
5. Writing materials (pencil, notepad), iPad with a communication app if you have one. A smart phone can also be used.

6. Large ace wraps
7. Crutches
8. Finger foods and drinks for a small finger food buffet.

Assign everyone a disability. Blindness (blindfold), earplugs and head sets for the “deaf”, paralysis for those in the wheelchairs, ace wrap the dominant arm of one or two individuals to their chests (arm amputation), crutches (can be used to mimic a below the knee amputation). The participant must keep one foot off the ground at all times) and assign a couple more participants as unable to talk and have them wear socks (stiff hands make it hard to sign and use apps). NO communication by mouth. They must use hand gestures, pencil, and paper and iPad/phone app only to communicate.

Team everyone up with another “disabled” participant then set their challenges. Each participant must meet the challenge and activity obstacles on their own, first, before they can ask for help from, or provide help to, their buddy. The activity challenges listed below are some of the more common ones we do. Use your imagination; tailor your activity to your environment and **keep an eye out for safety at all times**. Your participants are going to be clumsy so watch for trip and fall hazards.

Activity Challenges

1. Have everyone try to move down a narrow hallway at once without bumping into wheelchairs (or getting run over), knocking the blind into walls or leaving your blind and deaf companions behind.
2. Access the restroom by yourself (REALLY tough for the blind, wheelchair users and amputees. Crutch users had issues too)
3. Go outside one door and come in another (We leave the wheelchair accessible door locked)
4. Go to the Pastor’s office and request a menu for the buffet later on (the door was closed with a “please knock” sign on it). The Pastor is “clueless” at figuring out gestures and “mumbles”. Communication must be clear.
5. Set up a few activities in the gym or multi-purpose room involving balls and other PE type equipment. “Play” catch, kick ball, volleyball,

basketball etc. for 15 minutes, rotating use of the PE items.

6. Take a seat in a classroom (set up ALL the folding chairs in a classroom beforehand leaving no room for someone in a wheelchair or using a walker to have a seat).
7. Give a short lesson on Disability Etiquette (found here: <http://www.fldoe.org/ese/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette101.pdf> while playing music, LOUDLY (simulates over stimulation and what some kids with autism with sensitive ears have to deal with). Ask questions afterwards.
8. Invite participants to eat a light buffet style dinner. Each must pick up and fill their own plate, get their own drink and gather eating utensils without help. **(Be prepared to mop up some spills!)** Invite a couple of community members with disabilities or that have children with a disability to come in and talk about their accessibility issues during the meal. Allow participants time to ask questions.

** Activity note: Wheelchair users and blind can be “helped” in directions and into places they really don’t want to go by “helpful” helpers who then leave them alone to figure out how to get to their next point on their own.

By giving individuals a chance to “walk in another’s shoes” for a few hours we are, hopefully, changing perspectives and awareness of not only our surrounding environment but of the challenges of others as well. When it comes to awareness, experience can be half the battle.

