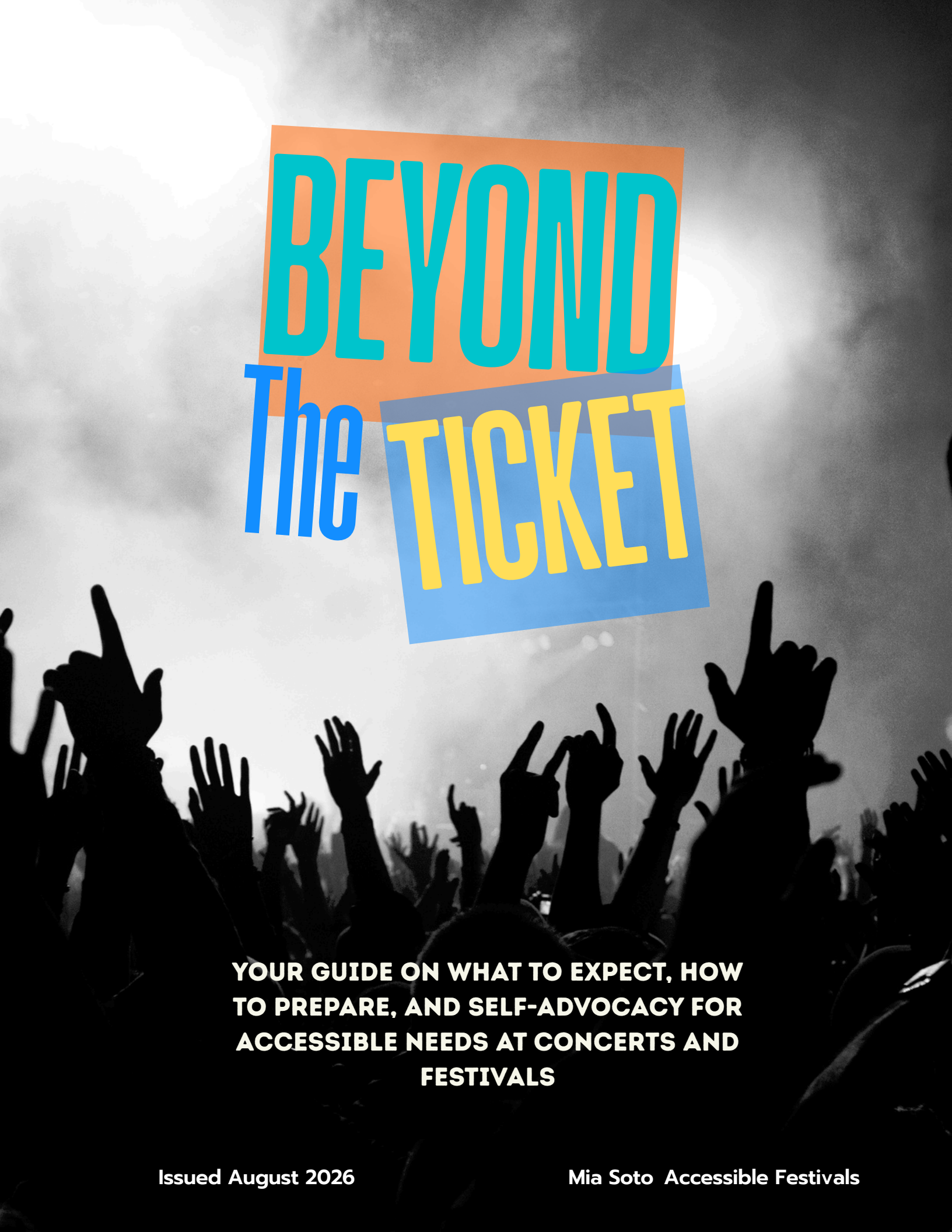




BEYOND *The* TICKET

**YOUR GUIDE ON WHAT TO EXPECT, HOW
TO PREPARE, AND SELF-ADVOCACY FOR
ACCESSIBLE NEEDS AT CONCERTS AND
FESTIVALS**

Issued August 2026

Mia Soto Accessible Festivals

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Accessible Festivals for helping bring my dream capstone project to life. As someone who loves concerts and festivals, it was an honor to create a resource aimed at making these environments more accessible and inclusive for all attendees. Live music is a meaningful leisure activity, and everyone deserves the opportunity to participate and enjoy the experience.

Thank you to my mentors for guiding me through this process. It has been an honor to work alongside you, learn from your expertise, and receive your encouragement and thoughtful feedback every step of the way.

Most importantly, thank you to everyone who completed the survey and shared your experiences. Your feedback helped ensure this guidebook remained attendee centered and grounded in real-world perspectives. Reading your stories, challenges, and successes has encouraged me as an occupational therapist to continue exploring ways to support accessibility and participation within live music environments.

Contact Information

Email sotom@huntington.edu

Social Media [@miaasoto](#)
[@accessiblefestivals](#)

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About The Guidebook

Purpose

This guidebook was created to help individuals feel more confident, support participation, and encourage engagement in live music events. The information portrayed in this guidebook has been informed from real-life experiences, observational insights, and accessibility research to tailor the guidebook in the most personal and assistive way. The goal for this guidebook is to provide helpful tips, strategies, and tools for self-advocacy while increasing confidence in planning for and participating in concerts and festivals.

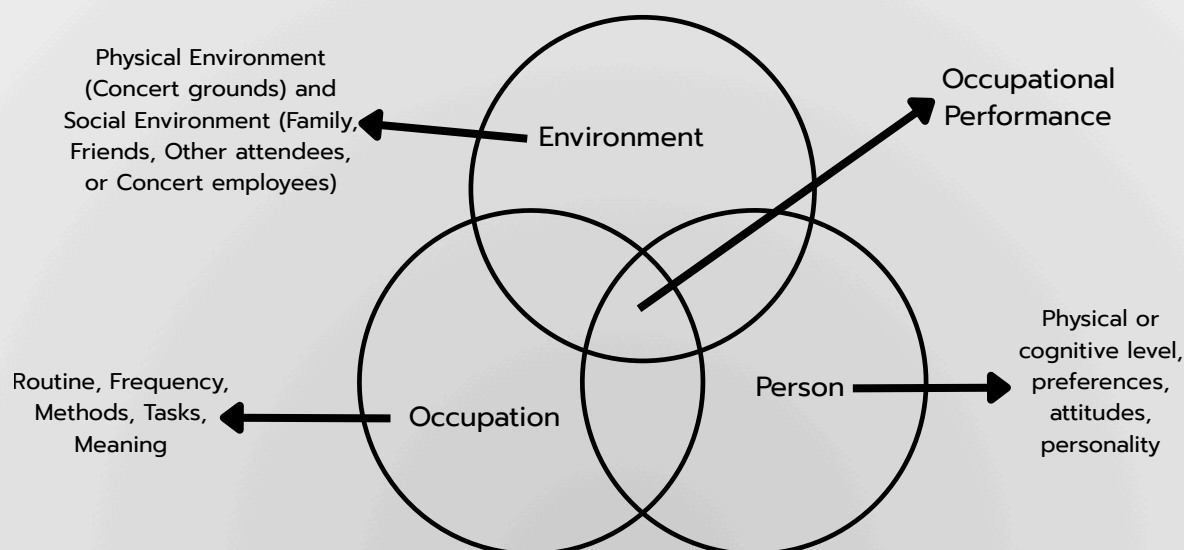
The *Beyond The Ticket* guidebook outlines things to consider when planning on attending an event, how to prepare, what to expect during the event, and how to care for yourself after. Topics in this guidebook range from questions to ask/consider before attending an event, items to consider bringing, and how to navigate sensory/physical fatigue. In addition, there are extra resources and tools provided at the end.

Accessibility and Participation

Every person experiences concerts and festivals differently. For many individuals with disabilities, chronic conditions, or sensory needs, barriers within the environment can make participation more challenging. Accessibility plays an essential role in reducing these barriers and supporting meaningful participation in community experiences. Finkel et al. (2019) describe accessibility as the measures put in place to support participation by those with impairments, permanent or temporary and physical or mental. Similarly, Lee and Jenifer (2024), define accessibility as the removal of barriers that prevent individuals with disabilities from fully participating in festival experiences.

Within occupational therapy, occupational participation refers to engaging in meaningful activities that contribute to an individual's health and well-being (Lund & Nyman, 2016). For many people, attending concerts and music festivals is a valued leisure occupation that provides opportunities for enjoyment, social connection and self-expression.

The development of this guidebook was informed by the Person-Environment-Occupation (PEO) Model, an occupational therapy framework that recognizes how interaction between a person, their environment, and the activities they participate in can influence occupational performance (Chan & Pang, 2018). By considering these factors together, this guidebook aims to help identify potential barriers and provide practical strategies to support participation in live music events. Whether this is your first event or fiftieth, this guidebook was designed to help you prepare, advocate for your needs, and attend with greater confidence.



This guidebook is also informed by the occupational therapy principle of occupational justice. Occupational justice is defined as every individual's right to participate in meaningful occupations regardless of disability or circumstance (AOTA, 2020). Leisure activities, including concerts and festivals, contribute to social connectedness, personal identity, happiness, and overall quality of life. However, barriers can decrease the opportunities for participation in these meaningful activities, leading to decreased health and well-being. While the PEO Model helps explain the interactions that influence participation, occupational justice further highlights that everyone deserves equal opportunities to engage in meaningful occupations.

Accessibility looks different for everyone. This guidebook recognizes barriers extend beyond mobility and was created to support individuals with a variety of physical, sensory, cognitive, neurological and mental health conditions that may affect participation in live music events.

Development and Evaluation

This guidebook was developed as part of an occupational therapy doctoral capstone project in collaboration with Accessible Festivals. The content included draws from current accessibility efforts, attendee perspectives through survey data, observations of live music environments, and review of current accessibility resources/literature. Shared themes throughout related to environmental barriers, sensory challenges, accessibility information, participation, and self-advocacy were used to guide this resource.

To ensure the guidebook was practical and relevant, feedback was collected from stakeholders and, most importantly, individuals with lived experience navigating accessibility needs at live music events. Feedback and evidence-based literature was used to refine the content, organization, and recommendations presented throughout the guidebook. The goal was to create a recourse that is informative, user-friendly, and supportive of participation in concerts and festivals.

How To Use:

- ◊ Before/Prepare Includes question to ask/consider prior to event, a brief packing list, and tips on how to prepare.
- ◊ During Includes what to expect at live events, navigating fatigue, and self-advocacy tips.
- ◊ After Includes tips on recovery and aftercare.

This guidebook is intended for the individual to have a quick resource to reference before, during and after live music events. Each section can be read individually based on your needs or in its entirety to get a whole look into things. Use this resource in a way that feels most helpful and supportive to your personal experience



Important Note

This guidebook is intended for educational purposes and does not replace individualized medical or occupational therapy recommendations. Individuals should consult their healthcare provider regarding recommendations specific to their health condition.

A black microphone on a stand is positioned on the right side of the page, angled upwards. The background is a clear blue sky with a subtle gradient. The text '01 Before The Event' is overlaid on the lower left portion of the image.

01

Before The Event

Chapter 1: Before The Event will dive into items you should consider when picking an event to attend. When the tickets are acquired and the plans are being made, there are questions to help you when thinking of accommodations needed and to use when speaking to venue staff beforehand. This chapter is intended to assist you when considering a concert/venue/festival by providing things to research and questions to consider asking when talking to the venue.



1.1 Choosing An Event

Research Accessibility

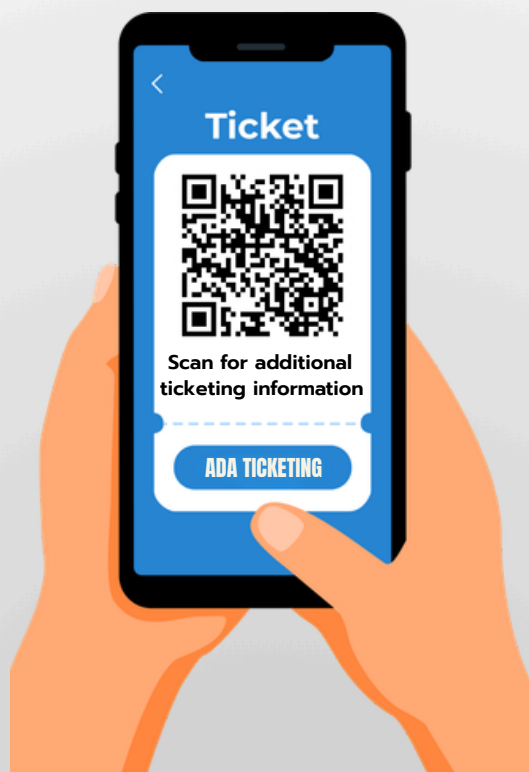
Throughout the guidebook you will find a few policies from the American Disabilities Act (ADA). However, it is strongly encouraged to complete additional research on accessibility, policies and requirements. Educating yourself with this information will bring confidence and stronger self-advocacy skills for yourself and others.

Venue/Festival Considerations

While all venues are required to follow ADA requirements, it is strongly encouraged to reach out to the venues and festivals to see what accommodations they are offering and how to get them. When researching venues/festivals there are a few things to consider beforehand to ensure you are well prepared and have a smooth experience:

- Terrain – Is it rocky? Grassy? Sandy? Concrete?
- Parking – Where is it located in relations to the venue?
- Mobility and Navigation – Stairs? Escalators? Elevators?

The physical environment of a venue can influence accessibility, comfort, and participation. Attending an unfamiliar venue may create uncertainty about available accommodations, navigation, and sensory demands. The following sections in this chapter, along with Chapter 2, will help identify important factors to consider so you can plan for successful participation in live music events.



Ticketing Considerations

Accessible seating tickets are required under the ADA to be sold in the same manner and under the same conditions as all other tickets. This means accessible seating tickets are to be sold during the same hours, method of purchase, and have the same stages of sale. Venues are not allowed to sell these tickets at a higher price than non-accessible seats. Tickets may be sold to individuals who require accessible seating themselves, or someone purchasing on their behalf (ADA, 2020). When purchasing an accessible seat, individuals are generally permitted to purchase up to three companion seats, although this does depend on the venue and available seating. If companion seats next to the accessible seats are unavailable, the venue should make reasonable efforts to provide seating as close as possible.

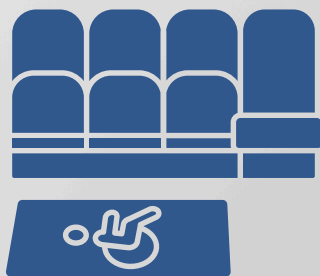
When possible, individuals are encouraged to purchase tickets early as research suggests it more beneficial as you have increased access to available seating options and accommodations. Survey participants in this capstone project reported that purchasing tickets at least one month in advance provides time to arrange accommodations such as American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, accessible parking, or other venue-specific supports.

If accessible seating is sold out or you accidentally purchase a non-accessible ticket, contact the venue as soon as possible to discuss your options. Many venues, ticketing companies included, are willing to work with attendees to find a suitable accommodation. If the issue is not resolved beforehand, prompt arrival on the day of may provide an opportunity to speak to staff and create a suitable solution. Communicating your needs will create a more accessible and enjoyable experience.

1.2 Questions to Ask Before Attending

Seating

Accessible seating options vary by venue and may include wheelchair accessible spaces, companion seating, or seats with easier access to entrances, restrooms, and other amenities. Understanding your options ahead of time can help you select seating that best meets your needs. Consider asking the following questions when planning:



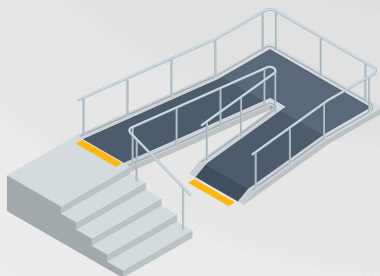
Where will the accessible seating be located? With safety regulations in consideration, do you know if it will be more towards the front of venue or back?

Can you see from your accessible seat without standing? Will the ADA seating be raised or same level as the crowd?

Will there be multiple locations throughout the venue or one main one?

Entrances

Many venues offer designated accessible entrances that may help reduce travel distance, avoid obstacles such as stairs, or provide a smoother entry experience. If an entrance is not accessible, there must be signs that direct you to the nearest accessible entrance (ADA, 2020). Identifying accessible entrance locations before arrival can help make your experiences more manageable and help avoid stress. To guide your planning, consider asking:



What is the entry process like?

Do I go through the main entrance or is there a separate entrance?

Is there ample room for mobility aids to get through the front entrances?

Through the aisles and common areas?

Restrooms

Restroom accessibility can vary significantly between venues and is often cited as the highest frustration from individuals. Each public and common use restroom must be accessible, however locating the nearest can offer comfort, reduce stress, and support preparation. Consider asking the following question before attending:



Are you aware of how far the restrooms are from ADA seating?

Are there separate ADA bathrooms? Or is the stall in the common bathrooms accessible?

What are the measurements of your accessible bathroom stall?

Parking

Accessible parking can reduce walking distance and improve access to venue entrances. Availability, location, and parking procedures vary by event and venue. Planning is important to ensure a smoother arrival experience. To help prepare, consider asking the following questions in advance:



Where is the accessible parking located?

How far is the parking area from the entrance? From ADA seating?

Are there golfcart services available to take me from parking to the event?

Sensory Supports

Live music events can be loud, crowded, and filled of sensory stimulation. Understanding what sensory support, a venue offers and how to prepare for your individual needs can help make your experience more comfortable and enjoyable. To help with planning, consider asking the following questions:



Are there any sensory accommodations available? If so, how do I go about getting them?

Will my own items be denied by security if I try to bring them into the venue?

Will there be a quiet/sensory space on site if needed?

Mobility/Navigation

Getting around a venue can involve traveling long distances, navigating uneven terrain, moving through and against crowds, and multiple access points. Planning ahead can help navigate the event more confidently and reduce potential barriers. Some questions that may help you plan include:



Are there stairs throughout the venue? If so, is there an accessible route?

Are elevators present? Are they operating and available for use?

Upon entry, where is the ADA tent/stand located?

Medical Equipment

If you use medical equipment, medications, mobility devices, or other health-related supports, it is important to understand venue policies and available accommodation before arrival. Taking time before the event can help you feel more confident, prepared, and supported during the event. Before attending, you may find it helpful to ask:



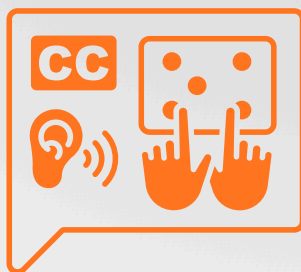
Is there an exception for medical bags or do they need to follow the clear bag rule as well?

Is there a plan of action for those in power chairs if the weather becomes extreme (storms)?

Where is First Aid? Do they provide just basic medical needs?

Communication

Access to information and effective communication can play an important role in your event experience. A venue must provide receivers for the assistive listening device, the number available upon your arrival will vary. However, signs must be provided to notify attendees the availability of receivers (ADA, 2020). Knowing what communication supports are available can help access important information, navigating the venue, and advocates for your needs. To support your preparation, consider asking:



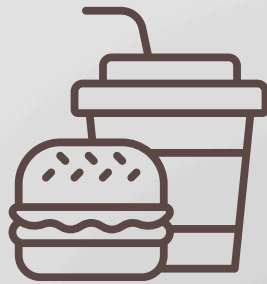
Is the staff ADA trained? Will they know how to interact with attendees?

Is there an ASL interpreter set up? If not, how do I request one?

If I need assistance, who can I ask?

Food and Beverage

Food and beverage options may be an important consideration if you have dietary restrictions, allergies, or medical needs. Reviewing available options before the event can help prepare, make informed decisions, and avoid unnecessary stress. Preparing ahead of time may involve questions such as:



Due to medical circumstances, am I available to bring in my own food?

How does the staff assist with navigating the venue when individuals have visual or mobility impairments?

Is there a lowered section of the main bar/concession stand to allow a guest in a wheelchair to order and receive their items comfortably?

The considerations you make and the questions you ask prior to the concert are to help you feel confident, prepared, and equipped to address challenges that may arise on the day of the concert. However, it is equally important to remember that attending a live music event should be an enjoyable and meaningful experience. While there is going to be some problem-solving and planning, the main goal is to support your participation, not create additional stress for yourself. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed when preparing, it may be helpful to revisit your plans, prioritize your needs, and adjust where needed so you can enjoy your experience.

With the tickets purchased and accommodations arranged, it is time to focus on preparing for the day of the concert and supporting well-being. The next chapter will explore strategies to help you take care of yourself and set up for a positive concert day experience.



Preparation is key to a more accessible and comforting event experience.



02

Preparing For The Event





In this chapter, you will learn how to better prepare for the specific event you are attending while also gaining tips to support your physical and emotional well-being before-hand. Additionally, this chapter includes a comprehensive list of items to consider bringing on concert day. These items include commonly forgotten essentials as well as tools and supports that other attendees have found helpful.

2.1 Planning and Preparation Tips

Research The Venue

One of the most effective ways to prepare for an event is to research the venue in advance. Many venues and festivals provide general maps of their websites that include information about where parking, bathrooms and concert grounds are located.

As the event day approaches more detailed maps for the venue will be available that will highlight ADA tent/stand, bathrooms, parking, merch booth(s), food and beverage area, stage set up, and seating arrangements. Researching the venue prior to the show can help you feel more comfortable and confident navigating the venue while allowing you to plan routes that best meet your individual needs.

When venue maps and seating charts are available, consider saving a screenshot or photo on your phone for easy reference on the day of the event. Having a copy available can help you navigate independently and may be useful when speaking to staff members who are unaware of how to assist or where they need to go. These maps can help you identify the most appropriate entrance, locate ramps or elevators, and better understand the overall layout of the venue. Reviewing the venue's prohibited items list, bag policy, and medical exception policy can also help prevent unexpected issues.

To further prepare, consider researching what others have said online. Reading reviews, stories, social media posts, forum discussion or accessibility-related feedback can provide valuable firsthand insight to the venue or festival. These real-life experiences may highlight additional information that you can't find on official websites, help you identify potential challenges, and provides the opportunity to connect with others.

Request Accessibility Accommodations

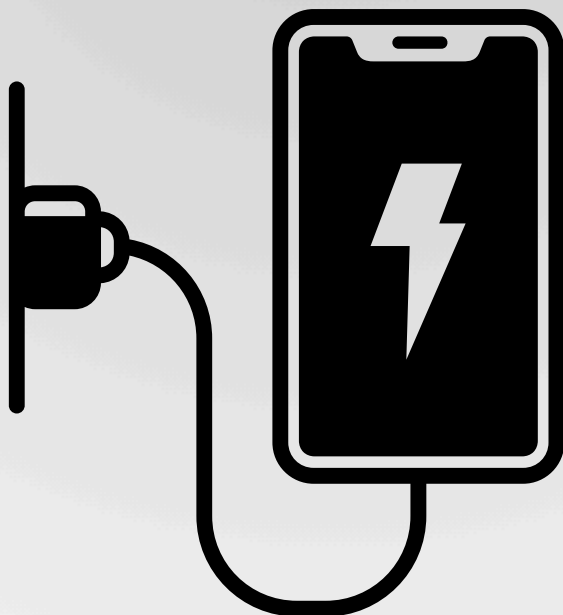
Ensuring that any additional accommodations are arranged ahead of time is an important part of event preparation. Many concerts and festivals ask for accommodation requests be submitted several weeks before the event, with some requiring requests at least four weeks in advance. Submitting requests as early as possible gives the venue adequate time to coordinate and provide the necessary accommodations.

After submitting your request, it is equally important to follow up with the venues ADA or accessibility team to confirm that your request has been received, ask any additional questions, and ensure accommodation will be available on the day of the event. Accommodations that would require an advance request include but are not limited to, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, CART (real time captioning), Assistive Listening Devices (ALD's), etc.

Charging and Packing

Packing a bag for event day may seem straightforward, but it is important to review both the items you regularly carry and any additional items you plan to bring. If your devices rely on batteries, take time to check that the batteries are fully charged and functioning properly. Batteries can unexpectedly lose charge, accidentally remain powered on, or simply be overlooked during preparation. Items that may require additional batteries include hearing aids, communication devices, mobility equipment, medical equipment, or cell phones.

The excitement of attending an event and the focus on coordinating logistics can make it easy to forget important items. Section 2.2 provides a list of commonly recommended items that attendees have found helpful to bring on event day. Creating a packing checklist and preparing your bag ahead of time can help reduce stress and ensure you have the supports you need to fully enjoy the event.



Hydrate and Fuel

Whether the event is indoors or outdoors, summer or winter, staying hydrated in the days leading up to the event is crucial. Proper hydration helps maintain energy levels, supports temperature regulation, and reduces the risk of symptoms such as lightheadedness, dizziness, or fatigue. A general recommendation is to drink roughly 2-3 liters of water spread out the day prior to your event, more if you are in a warmer climate. To avoid flushing it all out before the next day, have an electrolyte drink the night before to help your body retain the fluid. If possible, avoid excessive alcohol or caffeine intake the days prior (Mobile IV Medic Team, 2026). Concerts/festivals will involve long lines, unexpected delays, and extended periods of walking and standing, making hydration an important part of the preparation stage.

In addition to staying hydrated, properly fueling your body is equally as important. Concert and festival days can be physically draining, and eating proper meals the day of the event will decrease your chances of becoming faint and/or nauseous when arriving to the event. If you have food allergies, dietary restrictions, or specific nutritional requirements, consider eating before heading to the venue and review available food options ahead of time.

Rest

Furthermore, resting in the days leading up to and on the day of the event is extremely important. Conserving your energy throughout the day can help ensure you have enough energy to fully enjoy the show. Not only is this important for participation in the event itself, but also for navigating the venue and your surroundings. Having low energy while trying to manage obstacles, crowds, and an unfamiliar environment can quickly become overwhelming and draining. Getting a good night's sleep the night prior and conserving your energy the day of can be extremely helpful. Additional information on energy conservation strategies can be found in Chapter 4.



2.2 What To Bring

Thinking about everything you may need to bring to an event can feel overwhelming, especially as your packing list begins to grow. Depending on the type of venue (arena, outdoor, club, stadium, etc.), the items you choose to bring may vary. To help minimize stress and ensure items are not left behind, a comprehensive list of commonly used and beneficial items has been created. This list is intended as a guide which includes, but is not limited to:

- Medical bags
 - Medication
 - Extra clothes
 - Extra batteries
 - Medical supplies
 - Small wheelchair tools/tools needs in general
 - Extra cash
- Portable charger
- Emergency Health Information card
 - Diagnosis
 - Emergency Contact number
 - Physician number
 - Medication list
- Blanket
- Portable fan
- Ice packs/Heat packs
- Electrolyte packets - Check with venue on policy
- Adaptive Equipment/Additional mobility aide
 - Cane
 - Wheelchair
 - Walker
- Camping chair
- Water bottles
 - Unopened plastic bottles
 - Check with venue on reusable bottle policy
- Food - Check venue policy
- Venue map
- Rain poncho

Although these items are generally permitted, it is always recommended to review the venue's bag policy or contact the venue ahead of time to confirm they are allowed. A printable and reusable version of this checklist can be found in Chapter 5: Extra Resources.

Now that you've prepared for your event, the next chapter explores what to expect once you arrive, including common accessibility challenges, sensory and physical fatigue, and self-advocacy strategies to help support a positive live music experience.

03

During The Event

Chapter 3: Expectations will explain the different types of situations one may experience during their time at a concert or festival. While it's hard to predict if you'll experience any of these at a show, it is better to feel prepared and know what you may expect. Later in the chapter, sensory and physical fatigue will be discussed, and information will be provided on how to manage when at a show.

While emergencies are uncommon, it is still important to consider how an emergency may affect your accessibility needs. Upon arrival, familiarize yourself with accessible exits, identify where to seek assistance, and discuss a communication and meeting plan with those attending the event with you. Save emergency contacts on your phone and know who to contact if you need assistance.

IMPORTANT!

- Locate first aid and guest services
- Identify the nearest accessible exits
- Choose meeting place with your group
- Keep medication or medical supplies accessible
- Know how to contact venue staff if assistance is needed
- Share your location with companions



3.1 What to Expect

Crowds & Lines

Crowds and lines are an inevitable part of attending a live music event. Both often begin as early as entering or approaching the parking lot and continue throughout the venue including entrances, accessibility tents, merchandise booths, restrooms, food/beverage vendors, and the area's leading to your seat. When navigating crowds, you may be bumped into or jostled by other attendees, not only yourself but any mobility aid may also be struck. While waiting in line may seem simple, it can be physically and mentally draining depending on aspects such as energy levels, hydration, weather conditions, and length of the wait. If standing in line is draining, consider asking a companion to wait with you, using nearby seating, if permitted, or visiting popular areas during less busy time when possible.

One way to help minimize the impact of crowds and lines is to arrive early to the event. Extra time will allow you to familiarize yourself with the venue, locate important areas and plan accordingly for when the venue becomes busy. Survey participants reported that it was helpful to locate their seats early and identify the quickest routes to the restrooms, exits, accessibility services, and other important locations. Having this familiarity can increase confidence with navigating crowds and lines later in the evening if needed.

Calling the venue ahead of time to confirm when attendees may arrive can be beneficial as this will minimize you showing up early and having to wait in line to be let in. Attending early not only helps you familiarize yourself but allows you to get merch, food/beverage, and ADA wristbands earlier with shorter wait times.

Bathrooms

As said in Chapter 1, restroom accessibility can vary significantly between venues. While venues may advertise accessible restrooms and state that they follow ADA requirements, survey participants reported that accessibility can sometimes be limited or only meet the bare minimum. Individuals are encouraged to contact the venue and find the dimensions of the accessible stall to ensure your mobility aid will fit. Upon arriving at the venue, consider locating the bathrooms and identifying the most accessible route between your seat and the restroom. Survey participants from this project reported that accessible bathrooms can be advertised but come show day they are being used for storage or otherwise inaccessible on event day. If you encounter an issue with restroom accessibility, inform venue staff immediately so they can address the concern or direct you to an alternative option.

Terrain and Steps

While multiple different types of terrains may be more common at outdoor events, they can also be encountered at indoor venues. Terrain may include but are not limited to grass, asphalt, gravel, sand, cobblestone, tile, stairs, ramps, steps, etc. Recognizing these demands ahead of time can help plan rest breaks, pacing yourself, and determine whether additional supports may be beneficial. Navigating these environments can be physically demanding on the body and may present additional challenges for those with mobility aids. Between traveling to and from the parking lot and navigating throughout the venue, you'll be traveling long distances all day. Being prepared with appropriate and comfortable footwear can help reduce fatigue and support participation throughout the concert. When using a mobility aid, it may be helpful you adjust your posture, speed, and approach to each environment as each surface will require a different energy level from you and knowing when to adjust is important.



Staff Interactions



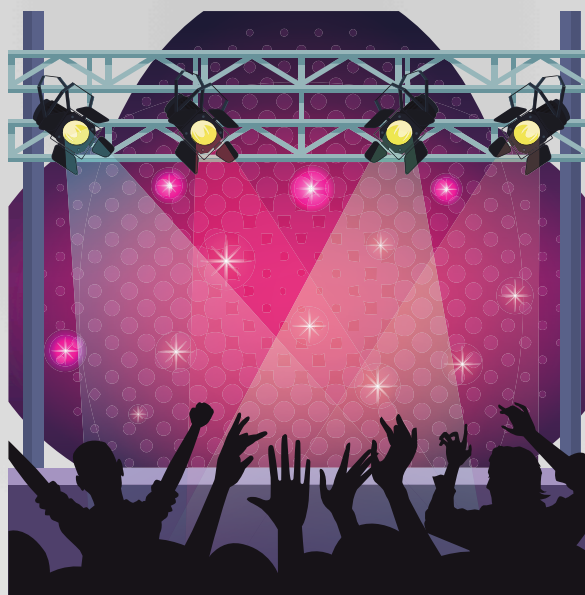
Interactions with staff can significantly impact your experience of the event. Staff members are often the first point of contact when arriving at a venue and continue to play an important role throughout the event. However, there may be times when you encounter a staff member who is unfamiliar with accessibility procedures, appears undertrained, or is unsure how to assist. While these situations can be discouraging and frustrating, they can also provide an opportunity to advocate for your needs. Having a basic understanding of accessibility policy, accessibility services, and a copy of the venue map can help you communicate your needs more effectively and assist staff in finding a solution. If an interaction is not productive, do not hesitate to seek assistance from another staff member or supervisor. While staff training and knowledge may vary, your feedback can help improve accessibility experiences for future attendees.

Sound and Light Exposure

Seating can play a significant role in sound and light exposure at a concert, and certain locations within a venue may be more overwhelming than others. Conversely, seating areas with limited lighting may be limited during a performance to avoid interfering with the show which can make navigation more difficult. If the venue does not offer a sensory kit or sensory support, it can be valuable to keep your own small flashlight, sunglasses or ear plugs in your bag. High-fidelity earplugs can reduce overall volume, while still protecting your ears. These items can help manage noise or light exposure, improve visibility through the venue, and increase overall comfort.

Food and Drink, Merch Access

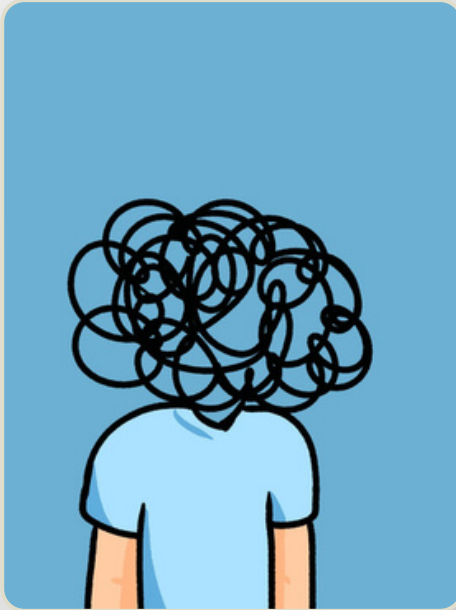
As discussed in the Lines and Crowds section, food and beverage vendors and merchandise booths are often busy and crowded throughout an event. Arriving early and locating these areas beforehand can help you determine whether they are accessible and identify the best routes to reach them. If you find that an area may be difficult to access, arriving before peak crowd times can make it easier to obtain food, beverage, or merchandise. Arriving early also provides an opportunity to speak with staff about any food allergies, dietary restrictions, or other accommodations you may need before the venue gets busy.



While every event experience is unique, understanding of what show day may entail can help you feel more prepared and confident when attending a concert or festival. This section was designed to provide insight into common experiences and challenges attendees may encounter, allowing you to better plan and know what to expect. Even with thoughtful preparation feelings of overwhelm, overstimulation, or fatigue may still occur and that is okay. The next section explores physical and sensory fatigue, what it may look and feel like, and strategies that can help you manage these challenges while enjoying your time at a concert/festival.

3.2 Navigating Fatigue

This section explores common sources of sensory and physical fatigue, how these present, and strategies to help your body recover in the moment. Additionally, it discusses ways to prepare your body beforehand to help manage fatigue and support participation throughout the event.



Sensory Fatigue

Sensory fatigue, also referred to as sensory overload or overstimulation, refers to when your brain receives excessive sensory information than it can comfortably process. This feeling occurs when the intensity of sensory stimuli, such as sound, light, or tactile, creates an overwhelming state of discomfort (Kalogeropoulos & Papadopoulos, 2025). Sensory fatigue can affect your physical, mental, cognitive, and social well-being in a negative way. Everyone experiences sensory fatigue differently. Some common signs include:

- Extreme Discomfort - Feeling like your senses are in overdrive and being unable to find relief or feel at ease
- Intense and Persisting Restlessness - Feeling as if you constantly have an internal “itch” that won’t go away or an irrational amount of internal energy
 - You may be tempted to fidget, tap fingertips, constantly be moving, or have trouble being still
 - This can leave you feeling aggravating and make you feel on edge, physically and mentally
- Panic - Feeling as though your body has entered a “fight-or-flight” response, which can showcase:
 - Physically - Increase in heart rate and difficulty breathing
 - Emotionally - Feeling overwhelmed, panicked, or like something is wrong, making it difficult to think clearly or make decisions
- Headaches - Can present in varied ways, however, typically is severe or dull and localized across forehead or concentrated around the temples
 - The more overstimulated you are, the worse the headaches appear as it often reflects your current level of overstimulation
- Energy Surges and Crashes - Experiencing sudden changes in energy throughout the event
 - Surge - Energy may spike as brain attempts to process your environment
 - Crash - Physically and mentally tired resulting in fatigue and exhaustion (Stavraki, 2023)

When you are listening to the artist, having fun with friends, and fully immersed in the experience, it can be difficult to find ways to re-regulate your system or notice when your sensory system needs a break. Taking a moment to pause and reset can help you regulate, reduce feelings of overwhelm, and continue enjoying the event.

Everyone responds differently to sensory input, so not every strategy will work for every person. Find an approach that works best for you and help your nervous system regulate.

Strategies to consider include:

- Self-calming: Deep breathing, positive self-talk, visualization of a happy/safe place
- Withdrawal: Noise cancelling headphones, stepping away into a quiet hallway
 - Stepping away for a short amount of time can help your nervous system recover before returning to the event, don't be afraid to need a break
- Mindfulness and Relaxation: Counting techniques, mind games, and practicing meditation
- Control of Environment: Creating/Going (if plausible) to a quiet zone, adjust lighting
- Sensory Substitution: Play white noise, utilize fidget toy, hold weighted item/comforting item
- Technology-based solution: Guided relaxation apps, watch calming videos
- Peer support: Express to friends or loved ones what is going on



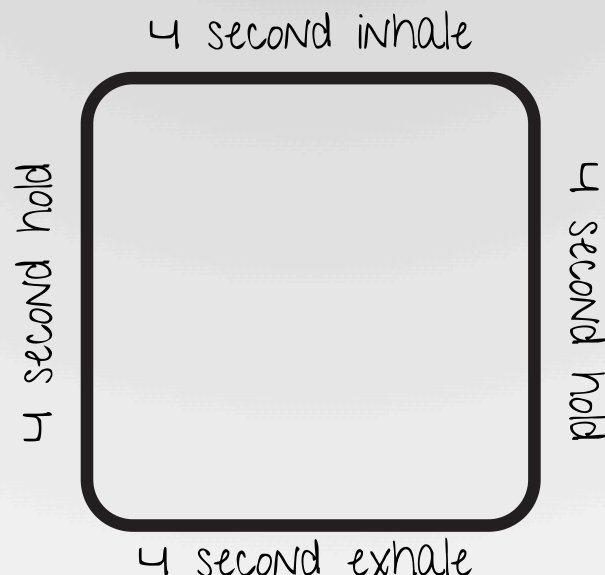
Quick Tip: Don't wait until you're overwhelmed. Taking short sensory breaks throughout the event can help prevent fatigue before it becomes too difficult to manage.

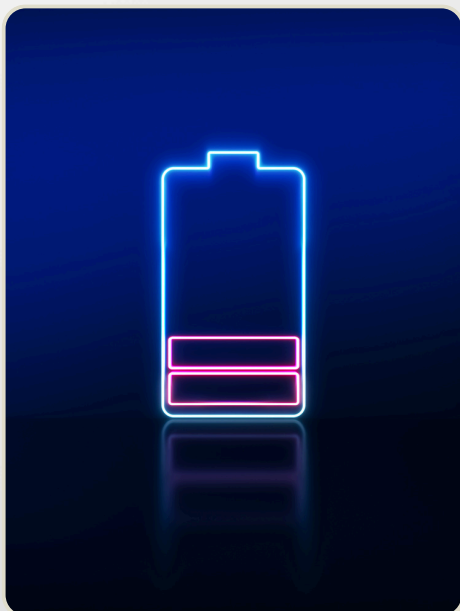
As important as it is to have calming and regulation strategies available in the moment, it is equally valuable to practice them beforehand. Becoming familiar and practicing these techniques ahead of time can help build confidence in using them, making them feel less daunting if you need to rely on them while actively feeling overwhelmed.

Some techniques that can be practiced include:

- **Deep breathing** - Finding a breathing technique that works best for you and learning how to perform it correctly can be helpful when feeling overwhelmed. Try to focus on taking deep breaths from your diaphragm rather than your chest. An easy way to check is to place a hand right below your chest, breathe in and you watch your hand raise, and as you exhale, it should fall. Once this is comfortable, consider picking out a breathing technique:
 - Box Breathing - Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, keep the exhale for 4 seconds before inhaling again. Often people will think of the 4 sides of a square when completing.
 - 4-7-8 Breathing - Inhale through nose for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale through mouth (pursed lips) for 8 seconds
- **Happy Place Visualization** - Before the event, identify a place, memory, or environment that brings you a sense of calm. Understanding and knowing your “happy place” ahead of time can make it easier to visualize when you need it, rather than trying to think of one while feeling overwhelmed.
- **Meditation/Relaxation Videos** - Practicing meditation or relaxation techniques, whether with an app or independently, before the event can help learn what works best for you. If you use an app, consider saving your favorite videos or exercises ahead of time to avoid additional frustration during the event.

If additional support is needed, research suggests sensory-based interventions such as occupational therapy, can enhance an individual's ability to engage meaningfully with daily activities and leisure occupations (Kalogeropoulous & Papadopoulos, 2025). These interventions can take forms in setting such as structured therapy or community-delivered programs. If sensory challenges are significantly affecting your daily life or ability to participate in meaningful activities, consider speaking with your healthcare provider or an occupational therapist to determine what supports may be appropriate. Reminder that this guidebook is intended for educational purposes and should not substitute individual medical advice.





Physical Fatigue

There is no uniform definition for fatigue, however research describes it as a symptom that cannot be relieved by the typical energy restoring strategies, such as rest or sleep (Maisel et al., 2021). Fatigue can affect mental or physical aspects, leading to decreased occupational performance, decreased quality of life, and have a negative impact on daily activities.

Fatigue can make it difficult in a concert or festival setting as it can occur in physical, mental or emotional form, making it difficult to sustain activity, diminish the ability to perform an activity despite the motivation to do so,

and hinder your mental state making tasks seem harder and requiring more energy than needed (Raizen, 2023). Fatigue is a symptom that stems from lifestyle factors, underlying medical conditions, or mental health; all of which can impact you at any given time.

Common symptoms that accompany fatigue include:

- Exhaustion
- Early Fatigability
- Muscle pain
- Increased anxiety, nervousness or irritability
- Trouble focusing or concentrating; zoning out
- Low energy
- Physical weakness
- Dizziness, blurred vision, or slowing reflexes
- Feeling of running on empty

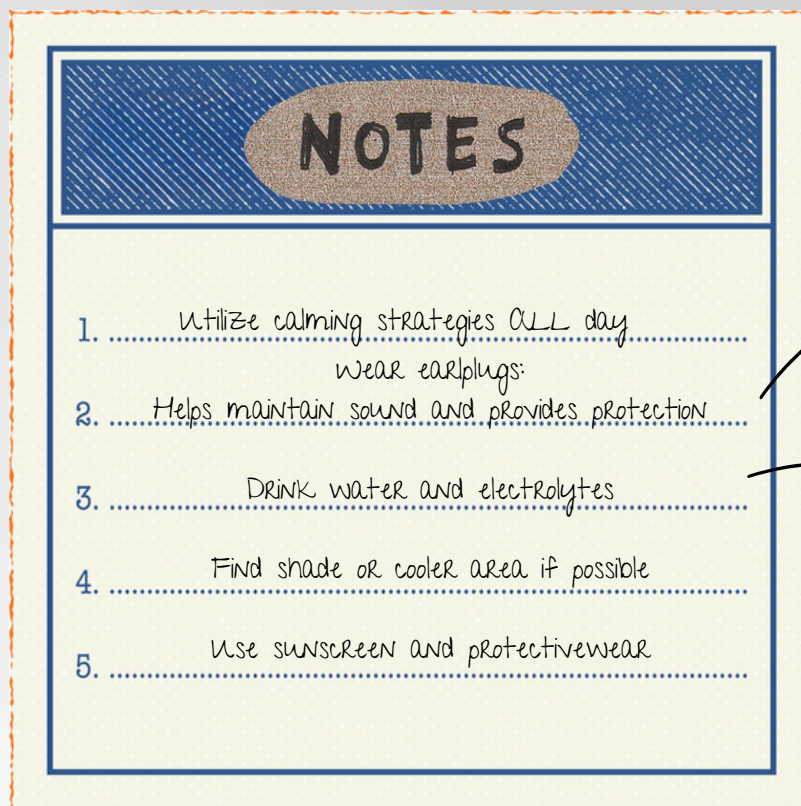
Managing fatigue in the moment can be challenging, but the following strategies may help improve comfort or conserve energy:

- **Sit down** - If possible, find a safe place to sit and rest. Sitting with an upright posture can help you recover while allowing you to focus on slow, controlled breathing.
- **Cool yourself off** - Use a handheld/portable fan, splash some water on your face, use a cool wrap, or move to a shaded area when available. Lowering your body temperature may help you feel more comfortable and improve your energy levels.
- **Drink water** - Rehydrating can help regulate body temperature and replace fluids lost throughout the day.
- **Have a snack** - Eating a snack to help regulate energy levels and give energy. If possible, choose foods that provide sustained energy, such as those containing complex carbohydrates and protein, rather than food high in sugar that may lead to an energy crash.

One of the most effective ways to reduce fatigue on concert or festival day is by using energy conservation strategies. Energy conservation is an occupational therapy strategy that focuses on completing activities that minimize muscle/body fatigue, joint stress and overall pain. By using your body efficiently throughout the day, you will be able to save your energy and feel better rested for the event. Energy conservation does not mean avoiding activity altogether, rather it allows you to complete tasks that are most important to you prior to enjoying your afternoon or evening. There are four key principles of energy conservation to keep in mind:

1. **Prioritize** - Decide what needs to be completed prior to leaving for the event and what can't wait until another day. Focus on tasks that are most important such as work, getting ready, traveling to the venue, and cooking your meals. If chores, errands, or responsibilities must be completed that day, try to complete heavier or more physically demanding tasks when energy levels are highest. This allows your body time to recharge and recover before your event.
2. **Plan** - Take time during the week to plan for concert day. Planning ahead can help you feel more prepared, gather necessary items, prepare meals, schedule rest breaks, and reduce last-minute stress. Remember that things are subject to change so don't be hard on yourself if you can't complete what you planned. The tasks will be there the next day, but the concert experience is happening today.
3. **Pace** - Maintain a slow and steady pace during your day and take breaks before you feel exhausted. Waiting until you are already fatigued can make recovery more difficult. Frequent rest breaks are important, listen to your body and know your limits.
4. **Position** - When completing tasks, sit when you can and maintain an upright posture when sitting or standing. Being upright will allow you to get more oxygen into your body therefore allowing you to work better and feel a bit more energized. If able, avoid excessive bending or reaching as it will cause you to fatigue quicker.

(Dreiling, 2009)



"Individuals who did not wear earplug/hearing protection are 5.3 times more likely to experience temporary hearing changes versus those who did after 4.5 hours of exposure at a live music event" (Ayo-Aijbola et al., 2026)

"Research suggests replacing 125%-150% of fluid losses during activities for events lasting ≥ 1 hour. Carbohydrate-electrolyte drinks are preferred over water" (Gauer et al., 2026)

Experiencing fatigue, sensory or physical, during a concert can feel overwhelming, frustrating, and even scary. Having the correct tools, tips, and mindset can make a significant difference. Practicing the techniques discussed in this chapter can hopefully alleviate some of the uncertainty and leave you feeling more prepared. Whether you are at the event or its the days leading up, it is important understanding how to recognize your needs and respond to them. The next section will explore self-advocacy strategies and ways to build the confidence to communicate your needs and feel empowered while doing so.



3.3 Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is the ability to communicate your needs, make your own choices, and stand up for your rights. It empowers individuals by providing them with the knowledge and skills needed to address barriers, navigate challenging situations, and participate in meaningful activities (Koca et al., 2023). Self-advocacy has four main components to it:

1. **Knowledge of Self** -

Understanding your strengths weaknesses, goals, support needs, and disability characteristics. This also include your ability to recognize problems and possible ways to address them.

2. **Knowledge of Rights** - Understanding your rights and available accommodations, in the case of this guidebook it is educating yourself on ADA requirements. Gaining knowledge about your rights will strengthen your self-advocacy skills.
3. **Capacity to communicate** - Understanding how to express your knowledge of self, rights, and concerns. Communicating includes the ability to use the skills of negotiation, assertiveness, and problem-solving skills; all while fulfilling the needs.
4. **Leadership** - Ability to advocate for yourself and others. Obtaining this will come from sharing resources, providing feedback, and participating in organizations within the community.

Self-advocacy is a problem-solving skill that can improve your concert experience and overall quality of life. It begins with understanding your disability, accessibility needs, and how they affect your daily life. This self-awareness helps you communicate your needs clearly and make informed decisions that support meaningful participation. Although you cannot prepare for every situation, the examples later in this chapter can help build your confidence and practice self-advocacy.

It is important to remember that your needs and accommodations are valid. Like any skill, self-advocacy becomes easier with practice and experience. If you have experienced dismissal or negative reactions in the past when expressing your needs, remember that each interaction is with a different person and may lead to a different outcome. Every opportunity to advocate for yourself can help strengthen your communication skills, build confidence, and reinforce the importance of your needs and accommodations.

Self-advocacy skills in the live music environment can help improve occupational participation, satisfaction and overall enjoyment at the concert/festival. Self-advocacy promotes empowerment by allowing you to take care of your needs through effective communication, self-awareness, and confidence. Individuals have expressed what helps them feel more comfortable and confident self-advocating for themselves:



Educate yourself on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) policies - Know these policies and requirements ahead of time as you can quickly recall when talking to others



Providing possible solutions or strategies for improvements - It doesn't have to be revolutionary but you may be able to help at least one more person for the night and bring light to the problem for future events



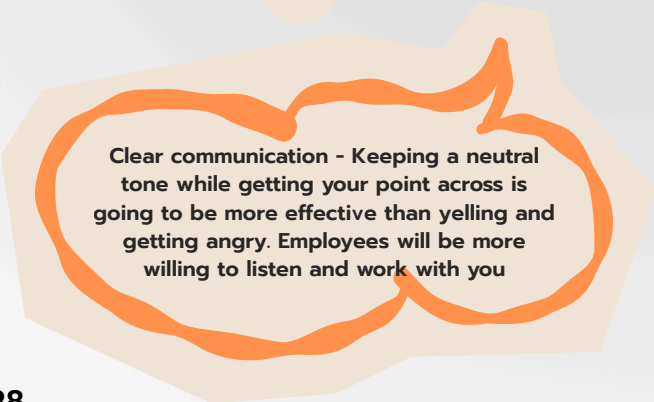
Have a companion or designated accessibility contact that is willing to help you advocate - Knowing you have another person that will agree with you and support you is all the extra courage you'll need to advocate for yourself in the moment



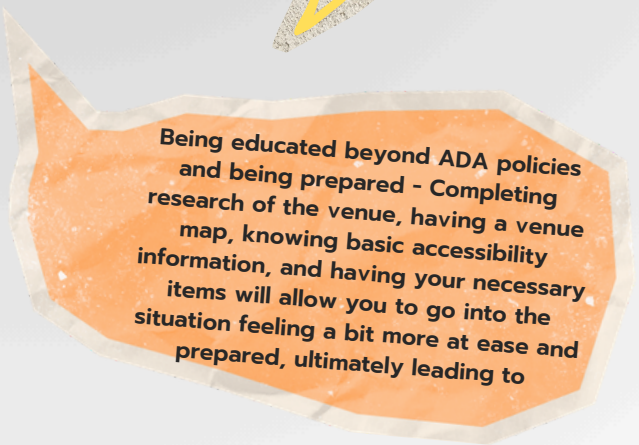
Find a trusting staff member - At times all it is going to take is having someone just listen



Not all disabilities are visible - Beyond yourself, you never know who you are helping



Clear communication - Keeping a neutral tone while getting your point across is going to be more effective than yelling and getting angry. Employees will be more willing to listen and work with you



Being educated beyond ADA policies and being prepared - Completing research of the venue, having a venue map, knowing basic accessibility information, and having your necessary items will allow you to go into the situation feeling a bit more at ease and prepared, ultimately leading to

The following scenarios were created to help you practice self-advocacy skills before attending an event. After each scenario, you will see a reflection question to identify communication barriers, clarify your core needs and evaluate what strategies work best for you in self-advocacy. Remember these are not intended to be remembered word-for-word, just ideas to gain skills, confidence and find what works for you.

Scenario 1: Dismissal

Situation: You explain your accessibility concern with a staff member and they respond with "You should be fine".

Self-Advocacy Response: "I understand, but this accommodation is important for me to participate safely and comfortably. Is there someone from the accessibility team I can speak with?"

Reflection: How would you remain calm, yet assertive, if your needs were not being understood of values?

Scenario 2: Asking For Help

Situation: You are struggling to navigate the venue but feel hesitant to ask for assistance.

Self-Advocacy Response: "I could use some help finding the most accessible route. Can someone assist me or provide the best route?"

Reflection: What makes it difficult to ask for help? How can you overcome that barrier?

Scenario 3: Not All Disabilities Are Visible

Situation: You are using an accessible entrance, seating area, or accommodation and someone questions whether you belong there.

Self-Advocacy Response: "Not all disabilities are visible. This accommodation allows me to participate safely and comfortably."

Reflection: How would you respond if someone questions your need for accommodation? Would you continue to explain yourself if they were skeptical?

Scenario 4: Managing Fatigue

Situation: Your energy levels are rapidly decreasing but you appear fine to the others who want to keep moving.

Self-Advocacy Response: "I need to slow down and take a break now so I don't become too fatigued to enjoy the remainder of the show. I will catch up after."

Reflection: What early signs tell you that your body needs to rest?

Scenario 5: You Deserve Accommodations

Situation: You wonder if you "really need" an accommodation because others may assume you are not disabled or don't require it.

Self-Advocacy Response: "Accommodations exist to support participation and engagement, needing support does not make my experience any less valid."

Reflection: How does using accommodations help you engage in meaningful activities?

SCAN ME!



04

After The Event

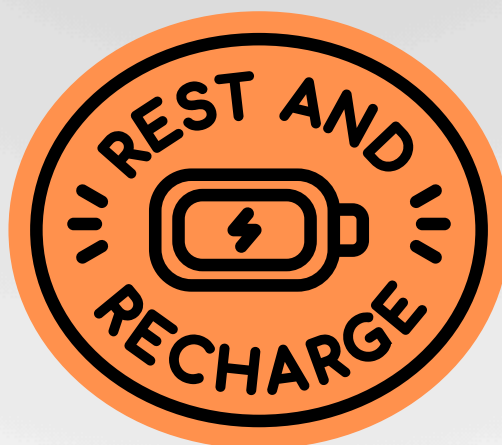
While the excitement, glamour and live music may be over, the journey doesn't end when the show does. Recovery after a concert or festival is just as important and the preparation but is often overlooked. Taking care of your body and mind properly post show can help you recover from fatigue, recharge, and return to your daily routine feeling your best. After all, if you do not take care of yourself how do you expect to keep yourself ready for the next? This chapter will provide tips and strategies on how you can care for your body physically and mentally to recover from the post-concert blues.

4.1 Recovery and Aftercare

Physical Recovery

If artists need recovery time after a show, why shouldn't you? While an artist's recovery is going to look very different, there are still things that you can do in your life that will have you waking up feeling refreshed and ready to continue the rest of your week. After a physically demanding night, you're going to need a few strategies on how to recover.

-  **Get Home Safe** The most important part of recovery is going to be getting home safely. If you choose to drink, always have a designated driver and never drive impaired. It can be helpful to know the best route home prior to arriving to the show in case of cell phone service, lost phone, or a dead phone. Drive safely and take your time.
-  **Rehydrate** Electrolytes, water, water and more water! After a night of dancing, sweating, and maybe a couple of drinks, replenishing your fluids is going to be the best thing you do. If possible, avoid further alcoholic drinks post-concert as it will only dehydrate you more and leave you feeling worse in the morning. Limiting caffeine late at night is going to be helpful as it is also a diuretic, therefore leaving you even more dehydrated. If you're attending a multi-day festival or another event the following day, consuming carbohydrates and protein within 1-2 hours of the event may also support recovery (Herring et al., 2022).



➤ Muscle Soreness

After hours of dancing, walking, and navigating the venue, it is no surprise if your muscles feel sore and tired. While going straight to bed may sound tempting, your body will benefit from you taking a hot shower or bath before sinking into the bed. It can also be beneficial to elevate your legs for a short period of time to reduce swelling and improve circulation.

➤ Sleep

Sleep may seem like the easiest recovery tool, however, can be the most difficult. After one, two or three days of adrenaline and excitement from the shows, it can be hard to relax your body and mind. Try creating a comforting environment and keeping your schedule light the next day to let your body rest and get the sleep it needs.



Mental and Emotional

While physical recovery is important, it is not the only aspect that is going to need nurturing. Dingle et al. (2021) suggested that music has benefits to health and wellbeing, so when the music is over you can experience a lower mood. Therefore, taking care of your mental and emotional well-being is going to be just as important after a concert of festival. Below you will find a few ways to decompress, lift your mood, and set yourself up for a successful week ahead.

➤ Calm Environment

It's no surprise that after a concert, your body may still be overstimulated. One of the best things you can do is to create a calm and relaxing environment. Things you can do to create a calming atmosphere is low lighting, calm music, staying off your phone, and weighted blankets/animals.

➤ Reminisce

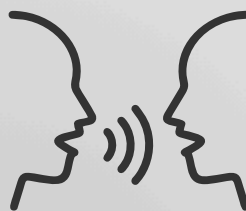
Just because the concert is over doesn't mean the fun has to stop. Spend the drive home, the time before bed, or the next morning talking about your experience with friends or family. Reminisce on your favorite moments, share things that others may have missed, and laugh about any memorable stories.

Exercise

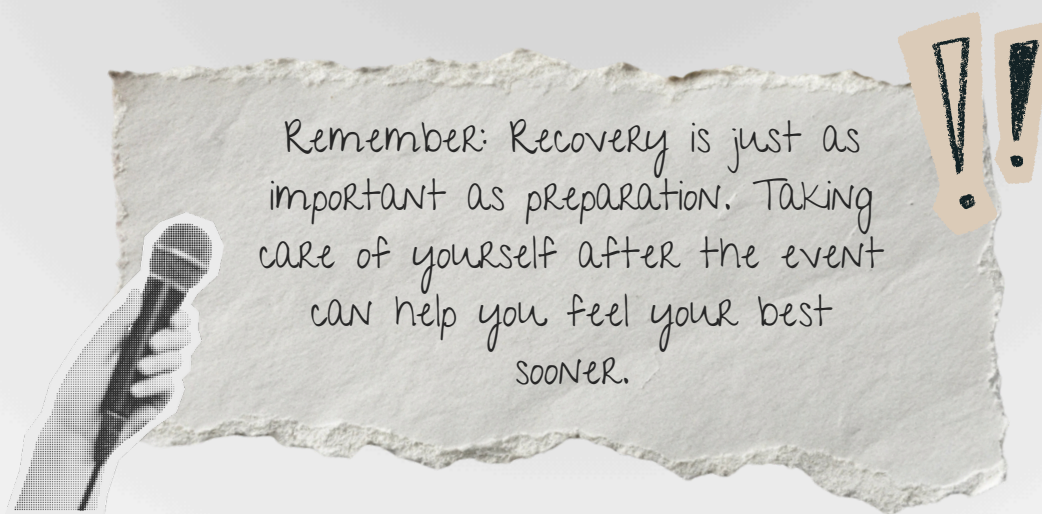
While movement can support physical recovery, it can also benefit mental well-being. This doesn't mean you have to take the first available class in the morning but incorporating light activity to get your body moving again. Not only will you be able to move your body physically, but endorphins will be released, therefore increasing your mood.

Plan The Next

The best way to fight the post-concert blues, is to have another one to look forward to! You may be missing the artist(s) that played but you can begin the countdown again to see another artist. Having something on the calendar to look forward to can be a great way to boost your mood and keep the memories alive.



The excitement, fun and music are officially over, but the memories remain. Attending concerts or music festivals is a meaningful leisure occupation, and everyone deserves the opportunity to enjoy the experience. This guidebook was created to help you feel more prepared, empowered, and confident in attending a live music event and getting the chance to see your favorite artists. While the concert is over, the support does not end here. The next chapter provides you with checklists and advice from experienced concert and festival attendees. Remember you are never alone in your journey and your needs and participation matter.



05

Extra Resources

This final chapter provides additional information to consider helping further prepare you for your concert or festival experience. It highlights potential barriers you may encounter, accommodations that other attendees have found helpful, advice from experienced concertgoers, and a reusable packing checklist.

5.1 Additional Tips and Resources

Barriers

Additional barriers you may encounter include:

- **Inaccessible entrance** - May limit access to lower-level seating, ADA areas, restrooms, or other parts of the venue.
- **Lack of ramps** - Missing ramps can make it harder to access seating, restrooms, or other venue areas.
- **Limited elevator access** - Elevators may be present but can be difficult to access due to demand or location.
- **Crowded accessible routes** - Crowds may block walkways. Be patients, but don't hesitate to advocate for access.
- **Stairs only** - Some areas may only be accessible by stairs. Plan ahead if you use mobility aids.
- **Inconsistent ASL/Deaf section** - ASL/interpreter sections vary by venue. Confirm the location before or upon arrival.

It is important to note that these barriers are often related to the venue's structure or environment, meaning they may be difficult for staff to address immediately. However, identifying and understanding these barriers can be helpful for your future planning and may also provide valuable feedback for venues to consider moving forward.



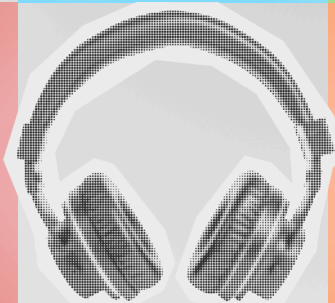
Accommodations

Additional accommodations that attendees have found most useful include:

- **Additional accessible viewing areas** - Some venues offer designated front-row or unobstructed viewing areas for wheelchair users or those with mobility needs. Contact the venue to ask what is available.
- **Accessible ticket exchanges** - Venues may allow you to switch to accessible seating if needed. Contact the ticket seller or guest services.
- **Golf cart transportation** - Some venues provide golf cart rides to reduce walking distances and conserve energy.

Advice

Experienced concertgoers were asked "What is the best advice you would give others?"

Don't be afraid. You belong!	Go to smaller venues first. You gain confidence in the concert setting and advocating for yourself.		There will be setbacks. Be patient and make the best of it.
	Allows you to see what accommodations you need and what works best for you.		Be prepared with extra medical needs.
Leave before the show is over or wait until everyone is gone.		There will be a learning curve in the beginning, but power through.	Be patient with others!
Get there early for food and drink. Limit once you get there to avoid leaving your spot too often.	Arrive early to allow extra time for parking, check-in, and navigating	Prepare for fun and challenges!	Advocate for yourself!



CHECKLIST

Double check before leaving. Mark it when you have it packed. Cross it out entirely if it doesn't pertain to you.

- ☐ Medical bags
 - ☐ Medication
 - ☐ Extra clothes
 - ☐ Extra batteries
 - ☐ Medical supplies
 - ☐ Small wheelchair tools/tools needs in general
 - ☐ Extra cash
- ☐ Portable charger
- ☐ Emergency Health Information card including:
 - ☐ Diagnosis
 - ☐ Emergency Contact number
 - ☐ Physician number
 - ☐ Medication list
- ☐ Blanket
- ☐ Portable fan
- ☐ Ice packs/Heat packs
- ☐ Electrolyte packets - Check with venue on policy
- ☐ Adaptive Equipment/Additional mobility aid
 - ☐ Cane
 - ☐ Wheelchair
 - ☐ Walker
- ☐ Camping chair
- ☐ Water bottles
 - ☐ Unopened plastic bottles
 - ☐ Reusable bottle - check with venue prior
- ☐ Food - Check venue policy
- ☐ Venue map
- ☐ Rain poncho
- ☐ Sunglasses
- ☐ Noise cancelling headphones/ear plugs
- ☐ Flashlight
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____



REMEMBER

Energy Conservation: an occupational therapy strategy that focuses on completing activities that minimize muscle/body fatigue, joint stress and overall pain. By using your body efficiently throughout the day.

PLAN → PRIORITIZE → PACE → POSITION

Sensory Fatigue Check-In:



Thank You!

Thank you for taking time to explore this guidebook and the strategies provided to help make concerts and festivals more accessible. I hope this resource has given you the tools and confidence to prepare for your next event, make the experience feel less intimidating, and advocate for your needs. Most importantly, I hope it empowers you to fully participate in the live music experiences that are meaningful to you. Now go enjoy your next concert or festival with confidence.



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