# People Who Have Psychiatric Disabilities

# Access Information Form

**To research solutions, search MIUSA’s extensive resources:** [**www.miusa.org**](http://www.miusa.org)**.**

# Disability Overview

## In your own words, please describe your disability.

#### What does this tell you?

* If the person gives you a specific diagnosis you can learn more online. Keep in mind, though, that the same diagnosis may manifest differently in different people, so it's best not to make assumptions
* A person’s symptoms may be affected by a variety of factors, including age of onset, previous treatment, medication changes, self-care routine, and the presence or absence of a support system.
* Some mental health conditions are stable, some improve or worsen over time, and some are episodic crises as a result of internal or external stimuli.
* Many individuals with mental health disorders have a history of varying diagnoses, depending on the evaluator, the purpose of the evaluation, and the setting in which the individual was diagnosed. The individual may or may not fully understand their history of diagnoses.
* Keep in mind that mental health diagnoses are technical jargon with specific meanings that may differ from the usage of the same terms in common vernacular. For example, an "antisocial," "bipolar," or "narcissistic" diagnosis may not hold the same meaning to a layperson as it does to a mental health professional. There may also be linguistic or cultural differences.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What prompted you to seek out mental health services?
* Has your diagnosis changed over time?
* Have your symptoms changed over time?
* Does your mental health change depending on conditions around you or how you are feeling? For example, can you feel better in bright sunlight or when you do not feel tired?

## How does your disability affect you on a day-to-day basis?

#### What does this tell you?

* It can provide information on the person's triggers, early alert symptoms, and self-care needs. The clarity and specificity with which the individual answers this question may indicate his or herself awareness and ability to self-advocate

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Does the impact of your disability change throughout the day or week (e.g., more symptomatic in the afternoon)?
* How do people around you respond to your disability-related behaviors?

### What events or behaviors worsen your disability? For example, stress, lack of sleep, large groups, skipping meals, interpersonal conflict, alcohol, etc.

#### What does this tell you?

* Mental health conditions can be exacerbated by environmental factors. Knowing the stimuli that might affect an individual’s symptoms can aid in planning.
* Alcohol and illicit substances may impact the effectiveness of prescribed medications, or may interfere with the individual’s medication schedule.
* Use of non-prescription substances, including alcohol, illicit substances, and over-the-counter remedies, may be an indicator that the individual’s medication regimen does not fully mitigate his or her symptoms.
* If the individual is utilizing alcohol or illicit substances to control anxiety or other symptoms, those symptoms may worsen when the individual no longer has access to the substance.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What strategies do you have in place to avoid those situations or lessen their impact?
* Which other substances, including alcohol, do you currently use? Which do you avoid? How is your mood or daily functioning affected when you are not able to utilize these substances, or choose to abstain?

## Are you participating, or have you participated, in treatment or services related to your mental health? Indicate on the following list services you currently are using and which you have previously used.

### Outpatient treatment/ Talk therapy

### Case management

### Residential services

### Medication management

### Inpatient treatment

### Substance use services

### Emergency services

### Disability Benefits from Governments (e.g. SSI or SSDI for U.S. respondents)

### Medicaid Waiver (U.S. respondents only)

### Representative Payee

### Other (Describe)

#### What does this tell you?

* Generally, the more services a person receives, the more impact his or her disability has on their daily functioning.
* Inpatient or emergency services may indicate crisis episodes, threat of harm to self or others, or legal involvement as a result of symptoms
* Substance use treatment may indicate that the person was "self-medicating" in order to lessen symptoms
* Ongoing services of any kind may indicate the need to seek or establish services in the host country. It may also be useful for the individual to establish a crisis/safety plan in the event treatment is not available.
* Case management services may indicate disruptions in the individuals employment, self-care, or daily living activities.
* Social Security, Medicaid waivers, or a payee can sometimes indicate that the person has difficulty living independently or maintaining employment.
* Many individuals utilize Social Security and Medicaid as children, but no longer need them as adults.

## Please list your current prescriptions. Include the name of each medication, the prescribed dosage, and the time of day you typically take each medication.

### First, Second, Third Medication Name:

### Generic? Yes or No

### Dosage Amount:

### How often do you take this medication ? Indicate number times/ day OR as needed

### When do you take this medication? (e.g. morning, evening, with meals, other)

### When does your current prescription expire?

### What side effects do you experience?

### What effects do you experience when you miss a dose?

#### What does this tell you?

* If the person lists medications, you can find information on side effects on the Internet. Keep in mind that the same medication may affect two people very differently.
* Often, and particularly for individuals taking multiple medications, finding an effective combination of medications is a matter of trial and error. Some medications may be prescribed for reasons not indicated on online fact sheets. A person with a recent medication changes (less than a year) may still be working toward the correct dosage.
* Schedule changes can impact the effectiveness of medications, as well as the side effects experienced. If the individual is traveling to a different time zone, some planning will be required to minimize the impact. Encourage the individual to engage his or her prescribing professional.
* Some individuals will adjust their own dosages based on current impact, side effects, schedule, or finances.
* Some medications (e.g., Lithium) require regular blood work to determine whether the dosage is appropriate.
* Some medications may not be available or legal in the host country due to patent laws or illicit substance laws. The individual should check with the embassy of the host country.
* Some medications can only be distributed in very limited amounts particularly if there is a risk of the substance will be abused or the person carrying the substance will be targeted for theft.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Do you take the medication as prescribed? Are there times when you skip a dose or adjust the dosage yourself?
* How long have you been taking the current combination of medications?
* How often do you see your prescriber for medication management? Will your travel interfere with that schedule?
* Does your prescriber ever order blood work as part of your regular medication management? Will you need to have labs done while you are traveling?
* How do you typically handle medication on days that are outside your normal routine (holidays, vacations, physical illness, etc.)?
* Do you have, or can you obtain, adequate quantities to last the duration of your travel?

## Are you taking any non-prescription (over-the-counter, herbal, etc.) medications?

#### What does this tell you?

* If an individual indicates that he or she is taking additional medications, it may be an indicator that he or she is experiencing other symptoms, possibly from an undiagnosed condition, or that the prescribed medications are not fully effective.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Do any of your medications require regular lab/ blood work to be done? How often does your provider order lab work?
* What benefits are you getting from these medications?
* Have you spoken with your doctor or mental health professional about their use?

## Which of these medications are you planning to bring with you abroad?

#### What does this tell you?

* The individual may need additional information on the laws related to medication in the host country.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What have you found out about the legality and/ or accessibility of these medications in the host country?
* Do you have an adequate supply for the duration of your stay? If so, what will you need to store your medications safely? If not. What arrangements have you made to obtain refills?

# Managing Daily Living

## Who is aware of your disability?

#### What does this tell you?

* Some individuals are very open about their disabilities; others choose to share that information with only a limited number of people. An individual’s preferences regarding disclosure can have an impact on the development of new support networks as he or she travels abroad.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Would you be willing to sign a release for us to talk to these individuals in case concerns arise?

### Who do you include in your support network? Will you be able to communicate with them?

#### What does this tell you?

* The answer to this question can help you identify potential resources if a crisis or urgent need arises.
* An individual's support network may have experience and insight into the management of the individual's disability.  They may have concerns or solutions that may be helpful during the individual's travel.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Do they know about your travel plans?
* What concerns have they expressed? What recommendations have they made?

### How do you communicate with the people in your support network?

#### What does this tell you?

* The individual’s answer to this question may indicate technology needs that should be in place during travel. For example, if he or she communicates with a key support through Skype, it will be important to identify internet access points. If the individual plans to engage in therapy, he or she may need information regarding whether they are able to continue formal therapy over Skype or other tele-health options due to therapy practice laws.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What steps have you taken to ensure uninterrupted communication? What still needs to be done?
* Have you developed a backup plan in case the people in your support network are unavailable (e.g., because of time zone differences)?
* Do you have a regular schedule of contact set up with individuals in your support network?

## What are your most effective coping strategies?

#### What does this tell you?

* The individual is likely to have developed one or more effective strategies that can be put in place as a prevention measure.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Are these strategies you can implement on your own during travel or will you need assistance?
* What have you tried that didn’t work?

## How do variations in your routine affect you (mood, medication compliance, self-care, etc.)?

#### What does this tell you?

* This question can provide you with insight into the individual’s customary level of structure. It would likely be to the person’s benefit to maintain similar levels of structure during travel.
* This question can provide you with information on the extent to which the individual has incorporated a self-care routine into their daily structure.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What is your daily routine? For example, what time to you get up or go to bed? Do you eat breakfast?
* How hard is it for you to maintain a routine when you’re away from home?

## In the past year, how many times have you missed school, work, or family events because of your symptoms or treatment?

#### What does this tell you?

* This question can help you to clarify the level of disruption the individual experiences in his or her daily life.
* Any positive response on this question should be included on the referral form.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What is the typical length of your absence (e.g., less than a day, multiple days in a row, etc.)?
* Do you absences occur at certain times of the year (e.g., holidays, seasonal changes, etc.)?
* Are there events that make it more likely that you’ll miss school or work (e.g., a significant other travels out of town)?

## What academic accommodations have been helpful to you in the past?

#### What does this tell you?

* Each individual with a disability experiences unique barriers which are influenced by a variety of factors, including medication effectiveness, history and effectiveness of treatment, coping strategies, related disabilities or conditions, traumatic experiences, and strategies to compensate for their barriers.
* In the same way that barriers are unique, accommodations can vary widely in effectiveness. Identifying what has worked in the past can help the individual develop an accommodation request that will be effective and available in the host country.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Are there particular areas that are more difficult for you than others (e.g., homework, exams, note taking, attendance, etc.)?
* Will you be taking any assistive technology with you when you travel?
* Do you utilize technology (such as phone apps) that may not be available abroad? What alternatives have you considered?
* What accommodations have you tried that were not effective?
* Are there accommodations you’ve seen or heard about, but haven’t tried, that you think might be helpful?

# Handling Crisis

## Do you experience crisis episodes, including panic/anxiety attacks or psychosis?

#### What does this tell you?

* An individual who experiences crisis episodes may benefit from having a safety plan in place, including a list of resources, regularly scheduled contact with support networks, and academic accommodations.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* How long ago was your most recent crisis?
* How many times a year do you typically experience a crisis?
* What strategies have been effective for you in managing crises (e.g., emergency services, self-care routine, support network, etc.)?

### How do you recognize when you are in crisis/ need emergency or urgent care? What thoughts or behaviors are clues?

#### What does this tell you?

* Identifying early signs may help prevent an escalation of symptoms.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What kinds of things do you typically do when you recognize a crisis may be beginning?

### During crises, do you typically seek out services yourself or do others recommend additional services?

#### What does this tell you?

* An individual’s answer to this question may give you insight into the person’s self-awareness and ability to self-advocate. Someone who indicates that he or she typically does not recognize or act on a need for services may benefit from a more structured environment or set of supports.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Who do you typically call when you seek out services?
* Who are the people who typically approach you with concerns or recommendations?

## Do you currently have a safety plan in place? Have you previously used safety plans to help you manage your symptoms?

#### What does this tell you?

* Safety plans are a commonly used tool, particularly for individuals experiencing suicidal ideation.
* Behavioral contracts are often used to manage disruptive or inappropriate behaviors.
* Any positive response on this question should be included on the referral form.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* How long ago was your safety plan developed?
* Did anyone assist you in developing the plan? Who in your support network has a copy of the plan?
* If you’ve previously implemented the strategies in the plan, how effective were they? Were there strategies that were not effective?

## Have you ever encountered legal or disciplinary issues as a result of your disability?

#### What does this tell you?

* The vast majority of individuals with psychiatric disabilities have no greater or lesser involvement with legal authorities or disciplinary systems than their nondisabled counterparts. If there has been legal or disciplinary action, it may provide some insight into the behaviors that can emerge during times of stress or changes in medications or services.
* The specific behaviors that led to charges or disciplinary proceedings can give you insight into early warning signs of distress. For example, an individual who had police involvement as a result of a suicide attempt may exhibit warning signs that are different from an individual who had police involvement as a result of assault (e.g., absenteeism vs. erratic or aggressive behavior). Knowing what behavioral indicators to look for may help the individual seek out early intervention.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Were there charges/ convictions or sanctions imposed? If so what? Will these affect whether you can travel out of the state/country?
* What strategies have you used to prevent similar events from occurring? Can the strategies be implemented during travel?

### What sanctions or legal consequences, if any, were imposed?

#### What does this tell you?

* The severity of any sanctions or legal consequences may be another indicator of behaviors that may emerge during times of stress or change.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Have you completed any required sanctions, probation, sentences, etc.?
* How long ago was the most recent incident?
* Were there specific factors or triggers that led to the event (e.g. medication changes, interpersonal conflict, life transitions)?

## Do you currently have or previously used a behavioral contract to help you manage your behaviors?

#### What does this tell you?

* Behavioral contracts are often used to manage disruptive or inappropriate behaviors.
* Any positive response on this question should be included on the referral form.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* How long ago was your behavior contract developed?
* Who assisted you in developing? Who in your support network has a copy of the contract?
* If you’ve previously implemented the strategies to manage what is in the contract, how effective were they? Were there strategies that were not effective?

# Further Information

## Have you ever had thoughts of harming yourself or someone else? Is yes, is this current or how long ago was the last time you had these thoughts?

#### What does this tell you?

* An individual’s answers to this question may provide some insight into his or her current functioning.
* It is not uncommon for people with mental health conditions to have suicidal/ homicidal thoughts prior to their diagnoses, or during changes in medication.
* Any positive response on this question should be included on the referral form.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Have you ever acted on those thoughts? If so, what was the outcome? If not, what strategies or supports did you use?

## Do you self-injure, or have you self-injured in the past? If yes, is this happening currently or how long ago did you self-injure?

#### What does this tell you?

* While self-injury can be a distressing event, it is not necessarily an indicator of suicidal intent. However, for any self-injurious behavior, it is important to revisit the discussion of stress management and support networks. Encourage the individual to work with his or her therapist to develop a written safety plan.
* Any positive response on this question should be included on the referral form.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Are your injuries typically visible or hidden?
* Have you ever felt the need to seek medical care for your injuries?
* How do others respond to your injuries? What do you tell them about the cause of your injuries?

## Have you ever been diagnosed with an eating disorder? If yes, when did you have or do you currently have an eating disorder?

#### What does this tell you?

* Eating disorders can be difficult to manage, even in the best of circumstances. Any travel that disrupts access to familiar foods, or facilities for exercise and food preparation, can present significant health barriers.
* Any positive response on this question should be included on the referral form.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What strategies have you incorporated into your daily routine to manage any symptoms or triggers you may have?
* What dietary restrictions do you currently observe (e.g., calorie intake, any foods you avoid, meal schedules, etc.)?
* Describe your exercise regimen, if any.
* On a typical day, do you prepare your own food, or do you consume food prepared for you by someone else?

## Have you ever experienced hallucinations or delusions?

#### What does this tell you?

* In areas with lesser developed mental health services, hallucinations and delusions may be poorly understood, or may carry religious overtones. An individual who experiences altered sensory perceptions may wish to carefully choose his or her travel destinations.
* Any positive response on this question should be included on the referral form.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What was the nature of your experience (e.g., voices, visual distortions, unrealistic beliefs, flashbacks, etc.)?
* Were your hallucinations/ delusions a one-time occurrence or did they persist? For how long?
* How did you address your experiences (medication, therapy, etc.)?

# Travel

## How do you typically approach speaking in public or new situations or with new people?

#### What does this tell you?

* The individual’s answers to this question may indicate the presence or absence of social anxiety, which can be a barrier to developing support networks.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* What are some ways you’ve made friends in the past (e.g., roommates, volunteer work, school, employment, support groups, religious groups, etc.)?
* Do you have any plans to participate in those activities while you are abroad? For example, presentations, cultural events, or host family interactions?
* If you are not fully comfortable in these situations, how do you typically describe your reservations? What alternatives have you found for participation?

## What sources of information have you used to learn about mental health services and cultural attitudes in the host country?

#### What does this tell you?

* The individual’s answers to this question may provide some insight into his or her level of awareness regarding services and cultural attitudes in the host country.

#### What follow-up questions could you ask?

* Is there a particular topic you’d like more information about?

**This form was produced by Mobility International USA,** [**http://www.miusa.org**](http://www.miusa.org) **with thanks to Shanti Ramcharan who is a Liscensed Professional Counselor and former Director of Disability Services at Emporia State University.**