



# A New Harmony

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## EQUITY, ACCESS, BELONGING

Volume II

**GALA**  
CHORUSES

# Neurodiversity Accessibility Checklist

*These suggestions can assist your chorus in creating spaces that are welcoming and supportive of neurodivergent individuals. Many of these suggestions are also relevant for individuals living with mental illness.*

## Lighting and Sound

- ☐ Dim light is preferred and can help reduce anxiety.
- ☐ Fluorescent lights—especially if buzzing—and flickering lights are distracting.
- ☐ Social gatherings held in quieter spaces can facilitate participation.
- ☐ Providing earplugs in noisy environments can help to diminish overwhelming stimulus.
- ☐ Subtitles can be helpful to make concerts and other events more accessible (CART: Computer-Aided Real Time Translation).

## Rehearsal Etiquette and Seating

- ☐ Create space between seats or remove every other chair to allow more freedom of movement.
- ☐ Provide different seating options, such as soft and hard seats. Invite singers to sit on the floor or stand.
- ☐ Consider allowing friends, family members, or emotional support animals in rehearsal or performance spaces.
- ☐ Allow space to fidget during rehearsal for anxiety reduction.

## Food

- ☐ Offer a variety of food choices to accommodate texture preferences.

## Interaction

- ☐ Create color coding on choir name tags to indicate preferences regarding social interaction (e.g. Green: please approach me, Yellow: only those I'm comfortable with should approach, Red: please leave me alone).
- ☐ Do not touch people without their permission.
- ☐ Create a separate quiet space where people can rest from interaction when they are feeling overstimulated.
- ☐ Invite neurodivergent people into conversations and give them time to respond.
- ☐ Create a “no one stands alone” policy to facilitate marginalized individuals feeling welcomed.
- ☐ Assign a buddy to help neurodivergent folks navigate the social and musical aspects of choir participation. Facilitate conversations with the pair so that the buddy understands the best way to support in rehearsal or concert settings.
- ☐ Plan structured interactions to help people connect.

## Instructions

- ☐ Provide written instructions that are clear and easy to follow.
- ☐ Let people know exactly what's going to happen and what they need to bring.
- ☐ Offer checklists and flow charts about what needs to be done and when.
- ☐ When arranging meeting locations, be very specific about where and when. Provide photos of buildings and rooms so that people can prepare themselves for new and potentially overwhelming experiences and have reassurance that they are on the right track.

## Chorus Travel

- ☐ Unfamiliar situations can arouse anxiety, so talk to neurodivergent members about their needs and accommodations before embarking on an overnight trip.
- ☐ During the overnight trip, have someone (a buddy, section leader, choir director) check in with neurodivergent individuals periodically to see how they are doing.
- ☐ Financial access
- ☐ Neurodivergent people can lack stable employment, so scholarships and tiered cost structures, with alternatives such as volunteering, can be important to facilitate participation.

# Tips for Handling Conflict

Group norms, stated or unstated, can be powerful, and when an individual acts outside of those norms, the group may experience conflict. Neurodivergent folks, people with mental health challenges, or individuals who have experienced trauma, can be at odds with the norms of structured choral organizations where we expect people to arrive on time, sit for long periods of time, stay on task, and navigate new anxiety-producing situations in crowded settings.

It is possible to problem solve ways for both the chorus and individuals to adjust to make a more belonging space for all. Here are some suggestions for dealing with conflict.

- Take a deep breath, and invite the chorus to breathe.
- Ease tension and de-escalate anxieties by providing a stable and caring atmosphere. When leaders help the chorus stay calm, it allows for the community to adjust with much less conflict.
- Notice what is happening and try to see the situation from every possible angle.
- Speak directly with individuals involved and learn what has been the most helpful for them in the past. See “Sample Code of Conduct”.
- Take the perspective of a listener and learner. Listen to the various needs in your community and the ways that your group could anticipate these needs. Gather written resources and consult with professionals as necessary.
- Address current issues/needs and also look ahead toward needs that may come up in the future. Be proactive in creating a welcoming atmosphere.
- Listen to the various needs of the group, learn about mental health and neurological diversity, and work together towards solutions.
- Do not make assumptions about the reasons people act the way they do.
- Recognize that whatever is happening is not because of the person labeled as “the problem.” Instead, there may be something in the system that hasn’t been able to adjust sufficiently.

With all the best planning and intentions, there may be situations where an individual’s mental health is so unstable that it is not possible for them to continue in the chorus, in spite of offered support, direct listening, and communication. In those cases it may be necessary to “bless and release” a chorus member. Ensure that such a decision is based directly on policies and procedures, such as the chorus’s Code of Conduct, as well as the organization’s mission and values.