

Mental Health Accommodations: “I have a student who...”

On Pages one and two you will find examples of real, de-identified students with PTSD and the barriers they have to education. Page three contains the accommodations we agreed on. The fourth page contains the “answer key.” Hopefully these examples show that, even though the diagnosis is the same, the barriers presented by PTSD and other Mental Health Challenges can be very different to every student.

1. “Layla” is a 28-year-old Hispanic female and a Marine Corps veteran who has chronic pain and fatigue from physical disabilities from moving heavy equipment in the desert sand while in the military. She also has a diagnosis of PTSD. During her meeting with the Accessibility Services Office, she discloses that the PTSD is the result of complex trauma. During her time in the service, she was caught in a firefight after an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) disabled her convoy. Although she was not seriously injured, five of her teammates lost their lives and more were evacuated for medical treatment. She also suffered sexual and physical violence at the hands of her ex-husband for a number of years. She states that, although she has physical symptoms, all of her classrooms are accessible, and the furniture is appropriate and works well for her.

When talking about her barriers, she states that she gets very anxious during tests, especially when other students begin to leave. She is afraid she will be the last one in the class to turn in her test. She says that when she has tests and quizzes where there is lecture afterwards and everyone stays seated, she does not feel that pressure. When asked if she would like a quiet testing environment and extended time she stated, “No, that would be horrible trapped in a small room by myself or with someone I don’t know. I would get very claustrophobic and have a panic attack.”

We agreed that her accommodations are:

A B C D

2. “Sammy” is a 62-year-old Navy Veteran who has chronic pain and PTSD from an explosion on the ship he was assigned to.

When talking about his barriers he states that when he has tests he freezes up and has a panic attack; the pressure of a time limit makes it much worse. The slightest noise from another student tapping a pencil or foot is amplified and keeps him from concentrating. He also states that, because of his symptoms, he often “blanks out” and misses portions of the lecture. He also states that when sitting in class he gets very stiff and sore and needs to move. The chairs in two of his classrooms are very hard on his back. Further, when his symptoms are very bad, he begins to have panic attacks and feels trapped.

We agreed that her accommodations are:

A B C D

3. "John" is a 34-year-old army veteran with PTSD, chronic pain and medical problems from a roadside IED explosion that overturned his Humvee and killed his sergeant and another team member.

When talking about his barriers, he states that he has two classes, at 2pm and 3pm, MWF. Because of his medical conditions, he has a \$3600 prescription delivered by a courier from the VA on the 4th Friday of each month. The courier usually comes in the morning, but could show up anytime between 9am and 6pm. For obvious reasons, he must sign for the package. In addition, he tends to have a high level of stress during tests, which is exasperated by his PTSD. He says that this is easier when there are less people and noises in the room and when he feels he has more than enough time to complete the test. He uses a service dog to calm his symptoms and for stability when he gets unsteady because of his medical condition.

We agreed that her accommodations are:

A B C D

4. "Trevor" is a 21-year-old openly gay African American male. He has a diagnosis of PTSD from multiple traumatic sexual events. When he was 16 years old, family members decided to "teach him how to be straight" by forcing him to have sexual relations with a female. He was also raped by three men older than him at 19 years old, while drunk at a party.

When asked about his barriers, he states that he has a hard time when under stress and begins to have traumatic flashbacks. This is especially true during tests. He also states that he feels "unsafe and vulnerable" and feels like he is going to be attacked while getting supplies from the storeroom in his art class. He also says that he feels unsafe in the classroom if he does not have a good, quick way to exit if he needs to escape.

We agreed that her accommodations are:

A B C D

A. Agreed accommodations

- i. Extended time for tests in a quiet environment
- ii. Preferential seating (near an exit)
- iii. Art supplies that are provided by the college are made accessible from the main classroom and not in a separate room.

B. Agreed accommodations

- i. Extended time for tests in a quiet environment
- ii. Digital recording of classes
- iii. The ability to stand/move during class
- iv. Specialized seating in the form of a more ergonomic chair placed in the rooms and reserved for him.
- v. The ability to leave class occasionally due to a medical condition.

C. Agreed accommodations

- i. Extended time for tests in a quiet environment
- ii. The ability to miss class on the 4th Friday of the month – if needed. He works out the details and arrangements to make up work and get class information with his professors.
- iii. On his request (and only because he requested it), faculty receive an email that they should expect a service dog in their class. The letter introduces the dog, reminds faculty about “service animal etiquette;” asking them to help other students understand how to act around a service animal (leave him alone and let him do his job).

D. Agreed accommodations

- i. Allowing a trusted classmate to remain in the room during tests until she is ready to leave.

1=D

2=B

3=C

4=A