

Designing a More Accessible World!: Conversation and Resources

Background

Physical access is a fundamental component of ensuring equality and inclusion for people with disabilities. Accessible environments—such as buildings with ramps, elevators, wide doorways, and accessible restrooms—enable individuals with disabilities to participate fully in society, whether at school, work, or in public life. Without physical access, people with mobility, sensory, or cognitive disabilities can be excluded from opportunities and experiences that many take for granted. This includes everything from attending a concert to voting in person or accessing medical care.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), enacted in 1990, plays a crucial role in guaranteeing physical access for people with disabilities. This landmark civil rights law prohibits discrimination and mandates that public accommodations (businesses and nonprofits open to the public and engaged in commerce), government services, transportation, and commercial facilities be accessible to individuals with disabilities. The ADA sets specific standards for physical accessibility in new construction and requires removal of barriers in existing facilities when it can be done easily and without great difficulty or expense. By enforcing these standards, the ADA helps remove barriers and ensures that people with disabilities can live independently and participate fully in their communities.

To learn more, you can visit these resources:

- The Northeast ADA Center's webpage on [Physical Accessibility](#).
- The US Access Board's [Guide to the ADA Standards](#)
- The New England ADA Center's [ADA Checklist for Existing Facilities](#)

Conversation Guide

When speaking to children about physical access for people with disabilities, it is important to convey the key concepts to them in language or terminology that is meaningful to them. Here is a sample suggestion of how this might be done.



Have you ever seen a ramp next to a staircase or a button that opens a door by itself? These things help people with disabilities move around more easily. Physical access means making sure that everyone, no matter how they move or what tools they use—like wheelchairs, crutches, or walkers—can go everywhere other people can. It's important because everyone deserves to be included and feel welcome, whether at school, the park, the store, or anywhere else.

Some people might not be able to climb stairs or open heavy doors. That's why we build ramps, elevators, and automatic doors—to help everyone get where they need to go. We also make sure there's enough space in hallways and bathrooms for people who use wheelchairs. When places are designed with everyone in mind, we make our world fairer and kinder.

When we think about physical access, we're helping make sure that people with disabilities can go to school, play at recess, and visit their friends just like anyone else. It's about making sure everyone gets to be part of the fun and part of the community. When we include everyone, we all benefit—because every person matters.