

Hello and welcome back to the SACIS podcast, Making Adjustments, where we take a thoughtful dive into an element of culture or a current event that could benefit from a few healthy adjustments. If you're new here, SACIS is the Sexual Assault Counseling and Information Service and we serve survivors of sexual violence as well as their significant others in the Eastern Illinois area. It is our mission to end sexual violence in society and we recognize that intersections of identities and different backgrounds and experiences all contribute to a culture of violence and oppression. And fittingly enough, that is exactly what we will be talking about today. We're so glad you're here and we hope you stick around for episode 2, justice for all.

If you are familiar with our agency or probably any other rape crisis agency, you have likely heard or seen the phrase at some point that we welcome and serve all survivors regardless of age, race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, origin, gender identity, language, ability, or any other identity factor. Maybe that was obvious to you before you heard it- why wouldn't we serve everyone? Well, we do want to reaffirm that for anyone who was confused or found it unclear, and to say that it's less about *who* we serve and more about *how* we serve them. For us to be effective in helping every client that comes to SACIS, we have to accept that there is not a one-size fits all way to heal people who have experienced sexual assault. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Every person who walks through our doors has endured widely varying challenges. And we want to serve them all well and equally to the best of our ability. It also needs to be said that people are marginalized and some individuals don't have the privilege of inherently feeling like they will be welcomed at every restaurant, business, healthcare facility, or other building they enter- so we want to make it clear from the start that they not only are welcome here, but that we will do everything within our power- whether it be through time, resources, education- to provide to the specifications of their needs and identity.

So some buzz words usually come up in discussion when referring to these ideas: it could be words like, justice, ethics, inclusion, intersectionality... and equity and equality, which we will be discussing a little more today.

If you have been on social media or read the news or had a conversation with pretty well any other human being in the past year, you have probably heard the terms equality and equity. And really knowing not just what those things mean, but what they look like when put into practice can help us to look at our systems, and policies and ways of doing things and see if it's effective. The definitions of these terms can seem complicated or multi-threaded and hard to understand, but to put it simply, equality is treating people or maybe equipping people equally, and what that may look like in action is giving everyone the same thing, whether it be resources, time, money, anything, and the idea is that, if everyone gets the same thing, then all will be fair and right in the world- but the problem with that is that not everyone needs the same thing to be successful. This is where equity comes in. Equity looks at the unique experiences of the individual and adjusts treatment of that person based on their needs to ensure they have the same opportunities as anyone else. Let's take a look at a quick example involving 2 people. Both have the same basic need for food. One lives in an apartment across the street from the local grocery store. And the second person lives 25 miles from the nearest grocery store and they don't have access to a vehicle. Equality might give them both a bus stop for the tram to the

grocery store by their respective homes, but the person who lives across the street really doesn't have a need for a tram to the store because they are able to walk or bike there. Equity, on the other hand, would provide transportation to the store for the person who lives 25 miles away, ensuring they have just as equal an opportunity to access food as the person living across the street from the store.

So why does it matter that we consider all of these different identity factors? Well, let's try a little exercise. Imagine you are at your favorite park. Parks were created for community recreation- they are supposed to be fun places that bring people together. Now think about what your perfect park would include: a swingset? A playground? A specific kind of tree? Mine would probably have lots of pretty flowers and a pond with benches around it. Once you have your idea of a perfect park, start thinking about why you chose those things. Did you only have to think about things you wanted in the park because you liked them, or because you needed them in order for the park to be enjoyable to you at all? Try imagining the perfect park again, but keep one identity factor in mind- for this example, I'm going to use ability. Does your park have sidewalks wide and smooth enough for a wheelchair to easily glide along the pavement? How much of the playground equipment would be enjoyable or convenient for someone who was in a wheelchair or was blind? Is there a bridge over the pond that everyone could cross? Are there places that only someone who was able to climb a ladder or stairs could access? Are there informative signs and can they be read by everyone? What we are considering here is accessibility. We want to ensure that everyone can access the park, use it, enjoy it- that's what it's there for, right? So with that in mind, how can you make small adjustments to the perfect park you had already imagined in your head that would better include those people whose abilities may differ from yours. This is the making adjustments podcast and this is our goal, is to start thinking about this critically and consider what and who we are neglecting in our public service institutions, what we might do to fix it, and how we will implement that adjustment. So back to our example, what ideas do you have for adjustments? My perfect park had a big flower garden that people could walk through. In my head, the path was made of mulch, but there's no reason it couldn't be something else, like pour-in-place rubber or concrete. I also saw a lot of different species of flowers with different shapes and colors, but I didn't really consider how someone who couldn't see would experience that. An idea I had was to consider the scent of the flowers and plants, so it might be nice to include some lavender or some sweet-smelling cinnamon basil. I could also research and see what plants attract birds that have enjoyable birdsong for people to hear. These aren't perfect solutions, they are just a few ideas. I'm sure that in your mind, you have other ideas that are different from mine. It is so great to have ideas and to have the passion and initiative to want to help other people and make a difference. But I will tell you, a truly radical idea- and one that might seem even a bit unnatural- is to stop trying to solve every problem on your own... and instead to go to someone who is differently abled and ask them what they would need and enjoy in a park.

This was an illustration but it applies to our infrastructure too, right? We can go to people of color, we can go to non-binary and gender queer individuals and ask them what they need.

Maybe the thought of that conversation makes you uncomfortable. The truth of the matter is, these conversations are probably going to be. There may be things you would like to pursue learning more about on your own and we are so glad if that is the case. In the description of this episode we actually have linked to another really great podcast episode about oppression and healing and how that is a collective effort and how we are all impacted by oppression whether we realize it or not- but when we work together there is freedom from violence and injustice for everyone. It's a great episode from the Man Enough podcast with Alok Vain-Menon, who is a non-binary poet and activist, and they have great things to say about compassion, so you should definitely go check that out.

Another big point that we want to make our community aware of is that we are not a political agency. SACIS has been supportive of bi-partisan legislation and legislation on both sides of the aisle. We know this time we are living in, is one of tension and division in more ways than one. But we are not willing to let any factor keep us from providing the necessary mental health and wellbeing services we offer for survivors of sexual violence. The only people who are not eligible to receive our services are offenders- even those who may have also experienced sexual violence- and that is firstly because it is a conflict of interest and we have a responsibility to protect the healing environment for our clients, and not because we don't think those individuals also need help. We just can't be the ones to offer it to them. Everyone is welcome here, and we want to make sure we have policies and standards in place within our agency which enforce that value and we want to make sure that everyone truly feels welcomed here. We are in the business of healing so it's necessary and super important to that healing process for us to make sure that our building and our services aren't contributing additional trauma to any survivor or significant other that walks through our doors, whether that has to do with sexual assault itself or any combination of intersecting identities.

On our end, a big part of that looks like transparency, in who we serve and who we employ. From 2019 to 2020, 88% of our clientele were white, 4% were Hispanic/Latino, 4% were Black or African American, 3% categorized themselves as falling into a multiracial or other category, and 1% identified as Native American. That is obviously not an equally distributed list of diversity, but it is reflective of the racial identities of the population we serve, which according to the US census, is about 91% white, 4% black and 2.5% hispanic. But regardless of the diversity rates in our service area, our goal for everyone is still the same. We want those 4% of Hispanic and Black individuals to feel just as believed, as welcomed, as valued, and as worthy of healing as the 88% and part of making that reality is taking into account and taking informed action based on their intersecting identities because they have an effect on them culturally and systemically within everyday life in America. Part of being "survivor-centered" in services is accounting for the unique and complex individuality of every client and developing a plan that best serves them with those things in mind.

Something unique to our specific agency is that we are located down the street from a state university. Thankfully we get to partner with them in many ways and are able to provide services like counseling and advocacy to students and sexual violence prevention trainings to clubs, Greek organizations, staff and faculty. As is the nature of any town that is home to a major

university, the population and demographics of the area can change quite a bit in the fall and spring when students are living in the area to attend classes, as opposed to winter and summer breaks when most students return home. (talk about age breakdown and how we want students to feel comfortable coming here)

We also want all economic backgrounds to feel welcomed and able to receive our services without having to worry about factors of transportation, childcare, time off work, or any financial impact that healing or pursuing legal action may have. Our services are free and we will work with individuals to meet them where they're at. Some ways we overcome the barrier of transportation is by offering secure virtual counseling options, providing gas cards for clients, helping them to arrange other methods of transportation, or meeting them at a different confidential location that is closer to them, because our service area does cover the span of several counties and towns.

Sexual assault can happen to anyone, so we want to think ahead of time about how we can best serve people working in all types of fields... whether that is the medical field or a corn field. If that joke didn't make sense to you, it is funny because we are located in the midwest in a region of farmers and growers.

At a basic level, we just ask for that kindness and compassion here at SACIS. We don't want a client or anyone else who comes in to be afraid to be here because someone may treat them poorly or disregard parts or all of their humanity. That is not beneficial to anyone. We know that hurt people, hurt people, right, but just because someone is in pain or has their own trauma does not give them the authority or go ahead to take that out by hurting someone else.

Pursuing Justice for all is more complicated than it should be. But that is only because of the system we have to work inside of. It requires us to fight for equity, it doesn't just hand it to us. The thing is, you have some choice in how much of that inequity you participate in- some of it is inherent, but you also have a choice in how you navigate the inherent power or privileges afforded to you. The empowerment and liberation of women, and LGBTQ people, and people of color, and people with differing abilities is something that is good and freeing for everyone- even and especially men. All of our freedom is tied together because we operate under the same system. And I think that is all we have to say for today.

Thank you so much for joining us on this episode of Making Adjustments. We appreciate our listeners and we hope that one thing in this episode got you thinking of how you can learn more or make an adjustment to your own life. If you would like to learn more about SACIS and the services we offer, you can visit our website at www.sacis.org. Have a great day and a wonderful August and we look forward to next time.