

# **Disability @ Yale**

## **Survival Guide**



## **Disability @ Yale Survival Guide**

Welcome to the Disability @ Yale Survival Guide, created and maintained by the members of Disability Empowerment for Yale (DEFY). DEFY, formed in the fall of 2016, is an organization focused on inclusion and advocacy for students with disabilities at Yale. We aim to ensure that all disabled students receive equal access to both social and academic opportunities.

### **Why read this guide?**

We know that the experience of disability at Yale can be confusing and decentralized. We also know that students who are struggling—whether with diagnosed or undiagnosed disabilities—may not know where to start as they reach out for help. This document intends to show students with disabilities at Yale that we are not alone.

### **Does this apply to me?**

There is wide variation in the “disability” experience at Yale. People with visible or invisible disabilities, with mental or physical illness, and with temporary or chronic conditions, can have different experiences. We have tried to incorporate as many of those experiences as possible, though we understand that we may not represent everyone. Furthermore, not everyone who experiences these issues identifies as “disabled”—you do not need to identify as disabled in order to benefit from the services detailed here.

*This guide was inspired by the Trans@Yale Survival Guide, originally written by SGH Gavis-Hughson SM '19 – we thank Trans@Yale for sharing their framework with us.*

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## **Quick FAQ and Links**

### **How do I get help for my disability?**

First, register with [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS). Fill out their [initial contact form](#) or contact them at [sas@yale.edu](mailto:sas@yale.edu). You can also request a [Disability Peer Mentor](#) to help you. If you are a first-year student, you may also [request a Peer Liaison](#) as part of the [Disability Peer Liaison Program](#).

### **What if I don't consider myself "disabled?"**

We say "disability" as inclusive of physical disability, mental illness, learning disability, hearing/visual impairment, invisible illness, chronic illness, temporary disability, and more. SAS can help you with any accessibility needs/accommodations.

### **Help! I've been struggling disproportionately with my language classes / getting really sick lately / feeling down and anxious all the time, what do I do?**

Even without a diagnosis, [talking with SAS](#) may be a good first step. If you have been struggling, they may be able to help you seek care, especially for potential learning disabilities. You can also simultaneously seek [physical health](#) or [mental health care](#) through Yale Health.

### **Once I'm registered with SAS, how do I use my accommodations?**

Academic accommodations must be "activated" for each class at the start of each semester. Living accommodations need to go through your residential college Dean each spring. Check out the first page of the [academics](#) section and [housing](#) section for more information.

### **I have a sports injury / concussion, and it'll be better soon, but I need help in the meantime.**

SAS can help quickly implement short-term accommodations for [temporary disabilities](#).

### **How do I see doctors while at Yale?**

For physical health, check out our section on [navigating Yale Health](#), which also includes information on insurance, the health system in general, and alternatives to Yale Health. For mental health, check out our section on [navigating mental health resources](#).

### **How can I find a community of students who care about disability issues?**

[Several extracurricular organizations](#), including DEFY (the creators of this guide!) focus on issues of disability at Yale. You can also check out our section on [social life](#) tips.

### **I'm overwhelmed. Help!**

We recommend signing up for a [Disability Peer Mentor](#), like a big sib for disability. Our Peer Mentors have been through similar situations and are here to guide and to listen.

## **Student Accessibility Services**

### **SAS**

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) handles all official accommodations and academic matters related to disability for Yale students. Most cases in which you need a concrete outcome or accommodation from Yale due to disability or illness involve SAS. The office is small (the creators of this guide feel that it should be allocated greater funding/support from the university), but generally quite friendly. If your disability will involve getting accommodations from Yale, it is worthwhile to reach out to SAS as early as possible.

Student Accessibility Services assists all Yale students who self-identify as having a disability of any kind, including both chronic and temporary conditions. SAS also provides help to students without a diagnosis who are experiencing symptoms and suspect they may have a physical condition, mental illness, or learning disability.

### **Contacting SAS**

To make initial contact with SAS, use their [new online request system](#) or reach out to them at the office-wide contact: [sas@yale.edu](mailto:sas@yale.edu). Please note that this form requires supporting documents: you can see the guidelines [here](#). Once SAS reviews your request, they will reach out to you.

### **Other ways to contact the office include:**

**Staff E-mails:** Sarah Scott Chang, Director at [sarah.chang@yale.edu](mailto:sarah.chang@yale.edu); Erin Braselmann, Associate Director at [erin.braselmann@yale.edu](mailto:erin.braselmann@yale.edu); Susan Olson, Associate Director of Accommodations at [susan.olson@yale.edu](mailto:susan.olson@yale.edu); Carolyn Barrett, Sr. Administrative Assistant at [carolyn.barrett@yale.edu](mailto:carolyn.barrett@yale.edu).

**Visit:** Stop by the office at [35 Broadway](#). The entrance is not on Broadway; it is located in the walkway between Morse and Toads, on the left (if you're coming from York Street) near the Off-Broadway Theater.

### **When to Visit the Office**

As soon as possible. If you are coming in with a disability already diagnosed since high school, this can be as early as Camp Yale before classes start. Otherwise, contact them as soon as you are reading this! If you know you have a chronic condition that gets better and worse, don't wait for a problem to arise; contact them ASAP so you have a plan in place.

**Before You Arrive: Pre-Existing Conditions**

Email Carolyn or Erin (above) and your Dean, especially if you require housing accommodations. Introduce yourself, explain your condition and what you need from them, and, if you have documentation, include a simple doctor's note or a diagnostic test of some kind for SAS. You can also start by reaching out to your Dean and not SAS (explaining what accommodations you seek, in which you may not need to include diagnostic documentation initially) or you can go straight to SAS, disclose to them, and have them instruct your Dean on what accommodations you require without disclosing your condition to your Dean.

**If No Existing Diagnosis**

Deans and Professors will occasionally refer struggling students without a diagnosis, especially those who they suspect may have a learning disability, to SAS. SAS has close ties with the Yale Center for Dyslexia and Creativity, and may refer students there for an evaluation. They may also help students who are struggling with new-onset mental or physical health issues without a diagnosis, though it is likely best to seek simultaneous [physical health](#) or [mental health care](#) through Yale Health. If you need help during this process, contact a [Disability Peer Mentor](#).

**Your First Meeting**

If you have already been diagnosed with a specific disability, there is no set menu of accommodations; each case will be dealt with individually and holistically to fit your specific accessibility needs. If you do not have a diagnosed disability or if you have a temporary disability, SAS will coordinate with you to determine what accommodations work for your situation. See below on how best to proceed:

1. Reach out to SAS initially by [filling out their form](#), calling, emailing, or visiting.
2. Meet with a SAS staff member (usually Erin if you are an undergrad and Sarah if you are a grad student)
  - a. SAS establishes what your needs are and how Yale can meet them
  - b. SAS comes up with a set of accommodations that fit your needs
  - c. SAS tells you how to renew and access your accommodations, along with other supports and resources that may be helpful to you.
3. SAS gives you a form to put everything in writing
4. SAS sends you emails about letters, how to activate accommodations, etc.

**Provided Accommodations**

SAS provides accommodations for both [academics](#) and [housing](#). Some of the most commonly-used accommodations include extended test time, note-taking assistance, and use of the special service van. Other situational accommodations not listed in this guide may be available to students.

## **Confidentiality**

SAS stores all their own information and there is no unified “permanent record” for any student at Yale. You are responsible for letting your professors know about your accommodations, through SAS “[Letters](#)”. This information will NOT go on your academic record.

## **Academics**

### **Setting Up Accommodations Each Semester**

Once you are registered with the office, you need to “[activate](#)” your accommodations online each semester.

### **Examples of Available Accommodation**

Your disability should never prevent you from participating fully in the intellectual life of Yale. Accommodations vary based on your individual needs, so some of the more common accommodations are listed below.

- **Testing accommodations:** Some disabilities may affect students in a testing environment. In these cases, an alternative testing environment or adjustments to exam timing can be arranged. For instance, a student with a learning impairment may require 1.5x exam length, or another student may require time for breaks during the exam. Other students may need to use a computer for writing exams instead of using the standard blue booklets. It is best to speak with SAS early in the semester to establish these needs. The day of the exam, you will take the exam with a proctor from your department or SAS will arrange an alternative location. We recommend you send an email to SAS about a week out from any exam just to ensure that your arrangements have been made.
- **Note-takers:** Some students’ disabilities may prevent them from effectively taking notes during their classes. In these cases, SAS can hire a note-taker, another student in the class who is paid to send their notes to SAS. Carlyn Barrett will then send you the notes via email. The note-taker will not know for whom they are taking notes. Sometimes there can be a significant delay between when the class takes place and when you receive the notes. There are now note-taking technologies available, so talk with SAS to decide what method is best for you within this accommodation.
- **Language Requirement:** For certain disability-related reasons, it can be possible to waive the foreign language requirement (in rare occasions). This is something that you need to coordinate with SAS.
- **STEM/Laboratory accommodations:** STEM courses, and lab classes in particular, bring unique challenges and considerations for disabled students. Special arrangements such as assistance using materials in fume hoods for mobility impaired individuals can be made. You should coordinate with SAS and the lab professor as early as possible. It might be worthwhile to meet with the lab professor early in shopping period as well.

Usually labs do not start until a few weeks into the semester, but it is best to allow sufficient time to work out necessary accommodations.

- **Library/Screen Reader:** Fortunately, the libraries at Yale have both physical assistance and adaptive technology available to assist students with disabilities. Their services include paging books from stacks and shelf areas, ensuring access to adaptive technology, wheelchair accessible printers, screen readers, and more. To learn more about their services, visit this link: <https://web.library.yale.edu/services-persons-disabilities>. If you have any questions about services at a particular library, contact that library's representative listed on the above webpage.
- **Temporary Incomplete:** A Dean can provide a type of extension beyond the end of the semester for extreme circumstances. For example, students with concussions may need an extra week (or several) to wrap up a final paper. If you have dealt with disability circumstances, either temporary or chronic, that have put you behind in a course, talk with your dean about authorizing a temporary incomplete.

### **Campus Transit**

Yale Transit operates a special service van for students who are permanently or temporarily disabled. It provides transportation to classes, extracurriculars, and other places on campus. First, you need to request approval for the special service van. You can do so by filling out [this form](#) and sending it to SAS, or just by talking to SAS. Sometimes a doctor at Yale Health will provide a note for SAS granting you special service van privileges. Once you are approved, you coordinate rides with Parking and Transit. How you use this service is up to you. If you only need rides intermittently, you can call Parking and Transit, 24 hours (203-432-2788) to arrange for rides as you need them. In those cases, be sure to leave enough time between when you schedule the ride and when the ride is supposed to take place, as there is a delay. If you need the same rides every week, for instance, you can schedule them on a repeating basis. Once again, this is arranged by calling Parking and Transit. If you require a wheelchair accessible ride, be sure to mention that. The service runs 24 hours a day Monday through Friday and on Saturday and Sunday from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 a.m.

### **Communicating with Professors: “Letters”**

SAS creates “letters” for your professors explaining that you need certain accommodations due to a legitimate medical condition. They do not disclose your disability/condition to protect your confidentiality. In order to create these letters, SAS needs you to input the course's name, meeting time, and test dates. An updated link for filling out letter information will be posted on SAS's website and the instructions can be found [here](#). Students will then deliver/send the “Letters” to their professors.

Some professors are more proactive about making their courses accessible and accommodating students with disabilities than are others. Often the best approach is to contact professors early in the semester to introduce yourself and your needs. Remember that you are legally protected with regards to disability, and you are **not** required to disclose why you need your accommodations or your specific condition(s). In most cases, the professor should be willing to work with you in order to accommodate your needs. Should you encounter any backlash or reluctance on the part of the professor, inform SAS so that they can intervene.

### Useful Apps/Software

SAS offers the following ideas of software that may serve as academic aids for students with disabilities:

- For text to speech computer based support, there is a free download for [Natural Reader](#).
- For a text to speech app at a nominal fee, go to [Voice Dream Reader](#).
- To help organize your thoughts before writing, try [Inspiration](#).
- For app support in note taking at a nominal fee, try [Notability](#).
- Use [Protect Your Vision](#) for reminders to take visual breaks from your computer—to reduce eye strain and prevent headaches.
- To learn to pace yourself, try [Awareness](#). Or for Firefox users, try [StretchClock Break Reminder](#), and for Chrome users, try [Gimme a Break!](#)

### Creating a Manageable Workload

Bluebooking (the term Yalies use for picking out classes) is an art. It can be difficult (and sometimes impossible) to create the perfect schedule, and disability factors can make the process more stressful. Some strategy suggestions for attaining the right workload:

- Use [Coursetable](#), an unofficial Yale course catalogue website. The site allows you to see information from previous years' course reviews regarding workload, quality, and more for classes and professors. Take these reviews with a grain of salt – you may end up loving a class that others don't – but a lot of people use them to help create a schedule with a reasonable workload
- **Credit/D/F** is also an option that you can use if you find that you have overwhelmed yourself. This can take the edge off of a stressful class and may allow you to redistribute your time to fit your needs.
  - Note: Most majors have restrictions on which classes you can credit/D (if they allow you to credit/D major requirements at all). Keep this and the deadline for converting a class from letter grade to credit/D in mind.
- **Dropping a course** may seem drastic, and you should think hard before doing so, but people drop classes all the time. This may be a good course of action, especially if you have disability- or illness-related matters interfering with your academics. You may want to speak with your professor and your dean before taking the plunge, and remember that

past the middle of the term, you will not be able to withdraw from a course without it appearing on your transcript.

- **A four-credit semester is perfectly reasonable.** Don't feel pressured into overloading yourself if you know that it isn't going to work. Just keep in mind that you will need to complete 36 credits in order to graduate and that Yale offers summer courses on campus and online for an additional fee (although if you work at Yale Summer Session you can take one course per session without cost).

### **Additional Academic Resources**

Yale has several other academic resources and support systems that are accessible to students. Some examples include the following:

- **The CTL:** The Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) is located in Sterling Memorial Library, through the York Street entrance (across from Toads). They offer the following services:
  - [Academic Strategies Workshops](#) offer organization and time management tips.
  - [Drop-in Writing Partners](#) are trained undergraduate and graduate students who can review papers in any stage of the writing process (from initial brainstorming to final drafts) with you. The quality of tutors is generally pretty high but can vary. Drop-in writing partners are in high demand during midterm and finals periods; arrive early to avoid long waits.
  - [Writing "Study Halls"](#) are chances to work on your paper for three hours at a time. Writing partners staff these sessions. Unlike with individual tutoring sessions, the writing partners won't give feedback on entire papers but will talk over small sections and help with brainstorming.
- **Residential College Tutors:**
  - All residential colleges have college [writing tutors](#), often professional writers who have taught writing courses at Yale or other colleges. They require an appointment in advance. You have the opportunity to meet with the same person on a more consistent basis over the period of multiple semesters and can work on developing your writing with them.
  - Colleges also have [math and science tutors](#), each of whom have different subject areas of specialty. You can view their specialties at the above link and choose the one which suits you. They have drop-in hours, so no appointment is necessary.
- **Office Hours:** not all professors have accessible offices, so if you have a mobility impairment you should contact your professor in advance to set up a meeting. Courses may also have TAs or ULAs (Undergraduate Learning Assistants) who host office hours. We recommend trying out several TAs for a course in order to assess helpfulness.

### **Finding More Resources**

*The examples above are not an exhaustive list.* Don't be afraid to speak up and advocate for yourself—be confident in the knowledge that you deserve to be here and are entitled to an equal opportunity to succeed. Your residential college dean and SAS are here to provide you with the resources you need. If you are confused, make an appointment to talk with them. If you are looking for guidance or advice from another student, consider participating in DEFY's [Disability Peer Mentor Program](#). The community of disabled students at Yale is here to support you.

### **Courses Pertaining to Disabilities**

Yale does not offer a Disabilities Studies program or other structured academic program for studying the complexities of disabled identity. There are, however, a few disability-related offerings. If you find that you want more of these offerings or a program in Disabilities Studies, let your professors and deans know. Demonstrating interest in disability courses is the first step in making that program a reality! Some examples of disability-related courses include:

- The Spectacle of Disability **(Fall 2019)**
- American Sign Language (L1-L4) **(Fall 2019)**
- Social and Cultural Factors in Mental Health and Illness **(Fall 2019)**
- Disability Histories: Research Seminar (graduate) (Spring 2018)
- Language, Disability, Fiction (Fall 2018)
- Disability, Science, and Society (Fall 2018)

Going forward, look for disability-related courses taught by Professors James Berger and Naomi Rogers. We also recommend that you forge your own path; many courses across majors have papers in which you can pick your topic and make it disability-related.

### **Academic Materials on Disabilities**

If you are interested in any sort of disability research, the Yale Library has assembled a collection of journals and articles that they call the [Disability Studies Information Resource](#).

### **Navigating Shopping Period**

Shopping period can be a challenging and overwhelming time for students with or without disabilities. Keeping up with assignments for those first two weeks, with a far larger than normal courseload, is difficult. Look through syllabi and class schedules in order to see what might be the best fit for you before shopping period begins and double check throughout shopping period. By doing so, you can limit your initial courseload to a reasonable number (8-9 maximum) which will reduce shopping period stress. Keep in mind your learning style and course needs to verify that your potential classes meet those standards. Compare the syllabi to ensure that work doesn't pile up at any given time (i.e. that you won't have 3 papers and a test in the same week).

There's also a lack of accommodations in place during shopping period. If you need accommodations from the first day of a course, contact SAS before shopping period. They

should be able to work with you to make the first few weeks of the class as manageable as possible before you finalize your schedule and complete your [Letters](#). If you have a mobility impairment, you should scout out the classrooms first to see what facilities are nearby, how accessible the location is, and if there are any other barriers for attending that class.

## **Housing**

### **Obtaining Housing Accommodations**

Contact SAS. If you are an incoming first-year, indicate your needs on your housing forms. Around May, you will be asked to send supporting medical documentation. If you're looking for accommodations for sophomore year or higher, talk to your Dean before housing draw (see below). They will likely require documentation from SAS as well. Housing accommodations are reviewed fresh each year in most cases, so students need to maintain treatment and documentation if they want to request again.

### **Ensuring Housing Accommodations Carry Over Each Year**

- Email SAS and let them know you had housing accommodations in the past and would like them to carry over. They will confirm that everything is the same and then email all the details to your Dean. They may also have you confirm on an online form.
- Talk to your Dean and set up a housing meeting. They will use that meeting to go over potential options in the college that fit your needs and, ideally, your housing preferences.
  - a. Ideally (and frequently!), Deans will make it so that you can live not only with the proper accommodations, but also with a preferred group of students.
  - b. Make sure this meeting is well before housing draw. Housing draw is typically in March, so mid February is a good time to send your initial emails.
  - c. If all goes well, you can likely bypass the housing draw entirely.

### **Possible Accommodations**

Accommodations depend on your individual needs, but some common requests include medical singles, a room on the first (or low) floor, wheelchair-accessible rooms and bathrooms, low person to bathroom ratio, air conditioning, and more frequent bathroom cleaning. You can also talk with SAS about having your ID# automatically programmed to open gate doors.

### **Moving Off-Campus**

Moving off-campus can be very different depending upon the location, number and personality of roommates, whether you're still on a meal plan, etc. Here's one possible experience:

- **Pros**
  - More freedom to choose your own food
  - More understanding roommate (choosing to live with close friends)
  - Fewer people using the same bathroom

- Can be quieter (depends greatly on roommates and apartment location)
- **Cons**
  - More time spent on chores, especially cleaning
  - Distance from residential college and other potential support systems
  - Possibility of eating less and/or less healthy because of time/effort required
  - No assistance from SAS on living space accommodations

### **Yale Dining and Dietary Restrictions**

Navigating Yale’s dining halls with a restricted diet can be difficult. The food options tend to be limited in general—there are only a few entrees and sides at each meal—and there is little variability in the menus between colleges. Generally, students who are seeking a dining accommodation should register with SAS using our registration form. We will reach out for documentation, if necessary, and instruct students to the Dining Form/ nutritionist to develop a plan.

#### **Informing the Dining Halls of Your Needs**

Students with significant dietary restrictions should declare those restrictions to Yale Dining using the [dietary needs self-identification form](#) (note that the form has a maximum word count, so if your restrictions do not fit on the form, you should email [yale.dining@yale.edu](mailto:yale.dining@yale.edu) and explain them). The form will not automatically grant you any accommodations, but it will alert the nutritionist to get in touch with you. It may also be helpful to register your dietary restrictions as a disability with SAS, especially if they are unusual or severe. Should you face continuing dining issues, SAS can work with your Head of College and dining hall manager to advocate on your behalf.

#### **How do I know what is in the food served?**

For many dietary restrictions, it may be sufficient to read the item cards placed by each dish. These cards disclose what the food item is, its nutrition information, and its ingredients and have visual icons representing the presence of the most common allergens, pork, and alcohol, as well as icons for vegan or vegetarian. It is important to be wary of these cards. If there is any question, first check to confirm that it correctly identifies the food item, as foods can be mislabeled. Ingredient lists may also be incomplete if they fail to break down the ingredients in subrecipes of commercially available ingredients such as hoisin sauce or “pancake mix.” You can always ask to see the full recipe/ingredients list. When in doubt, check the allergen icons against the ingredients list, and don’t be afraid to ask dining hall staff if something doesn’t match up.

Also be aware that one card may represent multiple items together even though they are actually separate, i.e. soup with cheese on the side or nacho bar with toppings, and cross contamination may be a concern. If there is any question, ask to speak with a manager or chef as they can

provide the most definitive information about the specific foods and bring you items from the back to minimize cross contamination. Checking the Yale Dining app or the [menu website](#) to make sure that there is food you can eat in the dining hall that day can be helpful. Be prepared to eat off campus or at a retail location (Durfee's, KBT, Cafe Med) if there is an issue.

**What if I have a more restrictive issue, such as multiple concurrent allergies, extremely sensitive or severe allergies, or rare allergies?**

Depending on your needs and comfort, reading ingredients and asking questions may be sufficient, but further support may require some intervention and negotiation with Yale Dining. The preferred solution that Dining offers at this time is personalized meals, which require that you notify the dining hall in advance where and when you will be eating, and often what you want to eat, in order for the dining hall to have food prepared for you separately at that time. You can expect this plan to remove flexibility from your schedule, and the food quality may be worse than the regular dining hall food (or better, depending on the college). Yale Dining prides itself on safety, so they push the pre-plated plan as it minimizes cross contamination. Remember that you can use this option as needed; it does not have to be everyday, and you can request to see menus further ahead of time (the app only allows you to look at tomorrow's meals).

Each dining hall has a grill option. Generally, you may ask the grill for chicken or a burger (regular and two vegetarian/vegan burger options) prepared in a separate pan according to allergy protocols. This will take some time, and you may want to supervise the cook to make sure they do not contaminate the food. The normal hamburger buns are brioche, which contain milk and eggs, but there are milk- and egg-free whole wheat buns available upon request (those with sesame allergies should be wary as they sometimes have stray sesame seeds due to processing).

For those with wheat and gluten issues, there is a small gluten free section in each dining hall, but it varies in quality and maintenance between colleges. This section stocks hamburger buns, bread, muffins, bars, spreads that haven't come in contact with bread, and a dedicated toaster.

Unfortunately, Yale Dining can be a challenge for students with multiple or extremely severe dietary restrictions. If you experience roadblocks (i.e., fighting with Yale Dining or SAS), always remember that it is your legal right to eat safely. Your Head of College is a good first stop as a potential ally. If issues continue, don't be afraid to escalate by talking to [Yale Dining administrators](#) or even the Dean of Yale College. If this sounds difficult or extreme, don't worry. Help in advocating, or just someone to talk to, is available by contacting DEFY or requesting a [Disability Peer Mentor](#). Several of our current mentors have experienced these struggles and are working with Yale Dining, SAS, and Yale administration to improve the allergy restricted dining experience.



## **Temporary Disabilities**

### **Communicating with Student Accessibility Services (SAS)**

Students with temporary disabilities should contact [SAS](#) even if they feel that they can manage their condition without support. Temporary disabilities are by their nature new and fluid. SAS has experience in predicting the academic, physical, and social implications of the condition and can help a student brainstorm a broad range of strategies and accommodations to make the changes as seamless as possible. Check out the [SAS](#) section for more information.

### **Housing Accommodations**

Most colleges have a guest suite or “disability” suite on the first floor reserved for students with temporary injuries (though many are not wheelchair accessible). If you are unable to access your current suite, talk to your Head of College and they may be able to arrange a temporary move. SAS can help. Check out the [housing](#) section for more information.

### **Academic Accommodations**

SAS can often work with a student experiencing a temporary disability to make accommodations discreet and appropriate for the student’s current needs. They will likely need up-to-date medical information. Check out the [academics](#) section for more information.

### **Getting Around Campus**

The [special service van](#) is available for students. For buildings with accessible entrances, see the [accessibility map of Yale](#).

### **Physical and Mental Health**

For information on healthcare, see the section on [navigating Yale Health](#). Due to the sudden nature of the changes in a student’s life, mental health services are often an important step in a student’s path to recovery. Check out the section on [mental health resources](#).

### **Talking with Professors**

If you receive classroom accommodations, you need to communicate those to your professors through “[letters](#)” which describe what you need in the classroom. It is often most effective to express your present need for accommodations to your professor and to update your professor should that need change. SAS or a [Disability Peer Mentor](#) are great places to practice [speaking with your professors](#) about your condition.

Please note that students with temporary disabilities are always welcome to reach out to the [Disability Peer Mentors](#).

## **Navigating Yale Health (Physical Health/Seeing Specialists)**

Yale Health makes seeing a specialist difficult. Demand exceeds the capacity to see patients, leading to long waits. Below are tips on how to see a doctor, detailed by insurance type. If you have the financial means to be on both Yale Health insurance and your parents'/outside insurance, that approach is strongly recommended since you can pursue both avenues. If you are struggling with healthcare or insurance issues, a [Disability Peer Mentor](#) may be able to help.

### **Yale Health Insurance**

A summary of Yale Health insurance student coverage is available on [their website](#). All students are automatically enrolled in [basic coverage](#) free of cost. Students are also enrolled in specialty coverage for a fee, though you/your parents can waive the fee and choose not to have the specialty insurance.

Yale Health insurance requires a [referral from a primary care provider](#) to see any specialist. Under this system, you would need to see a Yale Health PCP first before seeing a specialist—even if you know you need a specialist's care because of a previous diagnosis. In addition, specialist referrals that come from doctors outside Yale Health (i.e. your home doctor) require a prior authorization, so they are not as good as referrals from within Yale Health itself.

As a result, you should see a PCP as soon as possible. Wait times for well visits with a PCP can be two months or longer, so try to make this appointment as early as you can, even if it's routine. If you are currently having an issue, they can usually fit you in sooner. In some very rare cases, usually involving pre-existing conditions, they may be able to provide a referral to a specialist over the phone. If your issue is urgent, be sure to convey that. Referrals may take up to 120 days to process for "routine" cases, but up to 7 for "urgent" cases and 3 for "emergent" cases.

There are two types of specialist you can see—those at Yale Health Center and those outside of it. Yale Health's default is to refer you to the specialist that works directly within the Yale Health Center; however, if you have a rare condition, you may need to see someone outside the Center. In that case, if possible, try to do your research beforehand and find someone who specializes in your condition. You may also be referred to someone at Yale New Haven Hospital, which has multiple locations farther from campus. You will need to [request prior authorization](#) for any type of referral.

### **Parents/Outside Insurance**

If you are coming into Yale with your parents' (or other non-Yale Health) insurance, you may find the process completely different. It is important to note that Yale Mental Health and Counseling, Acute Care, and Student Health are available to students with OR without Yale Health coverage.

Some insurance plans only cover seeing certain “preferred” providers. These may not be at Yale Health, but you can usually find someone in the New Haven area. Ask your parents or search online for your particular plan. To see a specialist, some plans require a referral from another doctor, while others do not. It is important to know whether you need a referral, because if you need one and don’t get it, the office may refuse to see you, or the visit may not be paid for. If you need a referral, your doctor back home or a doctor at Yale Health should be able to provide one.

Your parent(s), or whoever holds the plan that covers you, is the best resource to help you navigate this bureaucracy, since they likely have been dealing with it for a long time. If you are unable to ask the primary plan holder, you can go to the website of your insurance provider or call them. If you are having trouble navigating the terms, [this website](#) may help define them.

### **No Insurance**

All students receive Yale Health Basic Coverage services free of charge. This means that even if you are not paying for any insurance at all, you can seek care in Student Health, Acute Care, and Mental Health & Counseling. You can learn about options for subsidized or lower-cost insurance via the [Affordable Care Act](#).

### **Confidentiality**

If you are 18 or older, your medical records cannot be released to anyone, even your parents. If you want them to see your records, you need to fill out [this form](#) and return it to the Health Information Management Department. If you have alternate (non-Yale Health) hospitalization coverage, bills or explanations of benefits may be sent to your home address where family members could see them.

## **Navigating Mental Health Resources (including Yale Mental Health & Counseling)**

Yale Health provides [mental health and counseling resources](#). Their staff includes psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers. Psychiatrists are always available and can prescribe medication if necessary. They also provide an anonymous [online mental health screening](#) service to narrow down what you might want/need help with. This process is not definitive. It is free.

### **Basic Information:**

- **Phone:** 203-432-0290
- **Website:** <https://yalehealth.yale.edu/directory/departments/mental-health-counseling>
- **Hours:** Monday-Friday 8:30 am – 5:00 pm.
- **Urgent care after hours** call Acute Care 203-432-0123.
- **Appointment times:** Appointments are available Monday-Friday between 8:00am and 6:00pm.
- **Urgent situations:** In urgent situations, any student can speak with an on-call clinician 24 hours per day, 365 days a year (daytime through MHC at 203-432-0290 and after hours through Acute Care 203-432-0123).

*If you're thinking about suicide or are worried about someone else, call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255), dial 911 or go/take them immediately to the nearest hospital emergency room for an evaluation.*

### **Counseling Appointment Process:**

1. Make an [initial appointment](#) by calling the office during their specified hours.
2. At this initial appointment, clarify what you hope to get out of your therapy sessions/what you need from them. Questions to consider:
  - What kind of personality do you think you would respond to best?
  - Do you have specific therapeutic/medical needs that should be addressed?
  - What type of therapy/therapist would be best for my needs?
3. They will take that information and match you with someone at Yale Health. This might take some time so if they don't reach out in about two weeks, give them another call.
4. During your first session, see what you think of the practitioner; try to clarify what you want out of the sessions. If it isn't working, then you do not have to continue seeing them. Just try to give it at least 3-4 sessions before you decide to try a different approach.
5. If you feel your arrangement is not working, be open with your therapist; they will be a great resource for finding someone else or exploring different options. Your mental health is very important and you deserve the best care possible. Call 203-432-0290 to leave a message that you would like a different therapist. Your newly assigned therapist will call you directly to schedule your first appointment.

**Confidentiality:**

Mental Health & Counseling records for Yale students are separate from other medical records, are excluded from the electronic medical record, and are kept in a locked room in Mental Health & Counseling. They will not release patient information to anyone including parents, Heads of College, Deans, professors, family, friends, coaches, employers, or the government without your permission. Everything discussed with a mental health clinician is held in strictest confidence and is not communicated to anyone without your permission, except in the rare instance of a life-threatening situation.

**Other Mental Health Resources:**

Walden Peer Counseling: Walden Peer Counseling is an anonymous, confidential hotline and walk-in peer counseling service staffed by Yale undergraduates. They are open every weekday and weekend night when classes are in session; the hotline operates from **8pm to 8am** nightly and the office is open for walk-ins from **8pm to 1am**. The hotline is (203) 432-TALK (203-432-8255) and their site is [walden.sites.yale.edu](http://walden.sites.yale.edu). Walden does not specialize in disabilities.

Good Life Center: The Good Life Center is a welcoming first stop for non-emergency mental health needs. It “exists to spread good vibes and provide a refuge from the daily grind. Our space is located outside the stress of academia, and inside the other exhilarating parts of humanhood. It’s a place to be quiet, meditate, play, create art, or do nothing at all,” located on the 4th floor of Byers Hall (the building of Silliman that holds the dining hall) and open 10am-10pm. They host events focused on mental health and relaxation plus mental health workshops. Visit their website at [yaleglc.com](http://yaleglc.com). Their director, Tracy, is easy to reach by email or in person.

Chaplain’s Office: The Chaplain’s Office provides a safe, calm space for relaxing, studying, and hanging out, complete with ice cream, popsicles, snacks, couches, and games. Chaplain’s Office staff are great people to talk to for emotional support, regardless of religious affiliation. The lounge is located in Bingham Hall on Old Campus in the basement of Entryway D, accessible by elevator in Entryway C. For more information, see their website <https://chaplain.yale.edu/>

**Pointers and Advice**

- Do not be afraid to ask for help. Mental Health services, Mentors, Frocos, etc. are all there to help you if you seek them out.
- If something isn’t working right away, be patient and persistent. Mental Health is a lifelong process. It may take time, but don’t give up!
- If you are looking for adult support in the process, consider talking with your Dean, your Head of College, and/or Student Accessibility Services
- If you are looking for peer support, DEFY members and Disability Peer Mentors are here to help.

- You might need to go through multiple psychologists or psychiatrists before you find one who works well for you. You should always feel respected. If you feel your arrangement isn't working, don't be afraid to call 203-432-0290 and leave a message advising that you would like to change to a different therapist.
- If you feel like your diagnosis is incorrect, it's okay to get a second opinion. If you are prescribed medicine(s) that don't work well for you, talk to your Dean about the appropriate actions to take and for a Dean's excuse for work missed.
- There are also [student groups](#) involved in mental health and general wellness.

## **Social Impact**

Being disabled should not prevent you from having a fulfilling social experience. Below are some situations that may arise during your time at Yale along with suggestions for navigating them. This is not definitive, so feel free to reach out to a [Disability Peer Mentor](#) or your FroCo.

### **Telling Your Suitemates**

One good way (especially for those coming in with a known disability) is to call a suite meeting at the beginning of the year to discuss general living concerns—including taking out trash, lights out, etc. You can tell everyone about your disability during that meeting. If anyone else has a similar situation, it creates a time for them to let the group know, too! If you're diagnosed later, be sure to keep your suitemates updated if you need anything from them.

If possible, you can include what you need from them in this general introductory conversation.

- ex: "I want to let you all know that I have IBD—it's an autoimmune disorder where my body attacks my intestines. Don't worry, it's not contagious. It means I may have to go to the bathroom more often or more urgently than most people. It also makes me tired a lot."
- "...So, what I need from you would be to let me know if you're going to take a long shower, or be a long time in the bathroom. And for you to be understanding about bathroom issues and tiredness in general."

### **Physically Accessible Social Spaces**

#### *On Campus*

The first place to look for physically accessible spaces on campus is the interactive Yale Campus Map, which shows accessibility information for buildings on campus: <https://map.yale.edu/>. While this is a great resource for main buildings on campus, it is not as helpful regarding suites and social spaces. There is no "official" way to find out if a specific suite, room, etc is accessible. Try to contact a friend in that residential college to find out before the event. You can always email the college's dean, who should know if that room/suite is physically accessible. Many suites in most colleges are not accessible, but all of the suites in Murray and Franklin are.

All Yale dining halls are accessible and the staff is happy to help grab your food if you have a mobility impairment. All butteries, which are great social spaces, are accessible. SAS will generally support you in finding accessible social spaces by encouraging student organizations to choose accessible locations for events and meetings. Most (but unfortunately not all) classrooms are accessible. SAS will change a class's location if it is not.

#### *Off Campus*

Fraternities are often difficult regarding physical accessibility; the only completely accessible fraternity on campus is AEPi. Other fraternities have backyards that may be accessible in the

summer. If you can contact someone from the fraternity beforehand, they may be willing to ensure their backyards/pathways are clear for you. Woads (minus the bathroom), Yale Off Broadway, and all of the shops and restaurants on Broadway are accessible. Your friends, Yelp, deans, and SAS can help you find out if social spaces are accessible.

### **Finding Welcoming Social Spaces**

You will (or should) find that most people are very accepting and welcoming, and your friends will be accommodating, especially as they grow to understand your needs. Tell friends/groups what accommodations you require in a straightforward but friendly manner; if you act dismissive or indicate your accommodations are not a big deal, others will react in kind. You can also ask a close friend or suitemate to help advocate for you in less welcoming settings.

### **Parties**

- If you have a physical disability that limits mobility, make sure to use the [Yale Safe Rides system](#). Franklin and Murray are the most accessible colleges (Stiles and Morse tower are a close second, as is Bingham tower for first-years), so look out for the elevators there.
  - Note: The Safe Rides System can get bogged down, especially on weekends. Call for a ride decently far in advance of when you want to leave, as they can take up to an hour to come. If you do get a ridiculously long wait time for a Safe Ride, it sometimes helps to cancel the ride and request another. The new request may go to a different driver with a reduced waiting time.
- If you are concerned about anxiety or other mental symptoms, try to recognize signs of being overwhelmed early so that you can act accordingly. Again, it is good to have a friend with some knowledge of the situation who can help in an emergency.
- If you have disabilities that require medications make sure you know if/when you need to take these in the context of alcohol or crowded spaces. Be sure to bring medications if you think you may need them and, if possible, have a friend who is aware of the condition and can help in an emergency.
- Don't apologize to your friends for changing their plans so that you can be included! Of course, it's a good idea to say thank you and show you appreciate their thoughtfulness, but know that switching which frat your friend group goes to probably isn't as big of a deal to your friends as you might think it is.
- Be confident at parties and remember that you deserve and can have just as much fun as your friends do.
- Try to determine if the party you're going to is accessible *before* the party; this might mean reaching out to the host, asking your friends, or even checking it out.

- For any person, disabled or not, it is always good to have a buddy system. Go with a person who knows your situation and whom you feel comfortable asking for help in leaving an uncomfortable situation. This comes down to: *always have an exit strategy*.

## **Extracurriculars**

### **DEFY**

Disability Empowerment for Yale is Yale's only undergraduate advocacy group for disabled students (and the creator of this guide!). Our goals are to make Yale a more welcoming place for disabled people and to support the community of disabled students on campus. Currently, we are a relatively small group working to make disability a greater part of college-wide conversations. We are always excited to welcome new members or to discuss disability at Yale with those interested. If you are interested in our group or would otherwise like to become part of the conversation, feel free to stop by one of our meetings. We meet 4-5pm on Sundays in the Student Accessibility Services Office (35 Broadway, 2nd floor). If you have questions, please feel free to contact Mafalda von Alvensleben at [mafalda.vonalvensleben@yale.edu](mailto:mafalda.vonalvensleben@yale.edu).

### **Disability Peer Mentor Program** (run under DEFY)

Our objective is to guide new students/students new to disability through the resources at Yale and through any issues that may arise with being disabled at Yale. If you have any form of disability and are interested in finding people with similar experiences who can guide you, sign up to be matched with a Mentor using the link [tinyurl.com/yalepeermentor2019](https://tinyurl.com/yalepeermentor2019). No diagnosis required! If you sign up, your participation in the program is fully confidential. The program is open to students of any class year and aims to pair students with someone who can serve as both a guide and a friend with an understanding of disability.

Signups are open at any time! Requesting a Mentor takes 5 minutes. If you would like to become a Mentor, the application is also available at the above link. Signups to become a Mentee are open year-round, but applications to become a Mentor will open in March. Feel free to email program coordinator Josie Steuer Ingall at [josie.steueringall@yale.edu](mailto:josie.steueringall@yale.edu) with any questions, or if you'd like to talk with a Mentor outside the formal matching process!

### **VARSIITY Baking Club** (DEFY partner)

VARSIITY stands for Vegan and Allergy-Restricted Sweets In the Tummies of Yalies. VARSITY is a way to connect with a community of students at Yale with various dietary restrictions. Many of our members have food allergies, many are vegan or have other special diets, and some have no restrictions! We bring all these people together to learn from each other, to share resources (such as accommodating local restaurants, recipes, etc.), to bake, and to eat! Our mission is to make sure that everyone has something they can safely and comfortably eat at our events. Throughout the year we host baking sessions where we choose and alter the recipe based on the dietary needs of those who are attending, pizza nights where the dining hall makes vegan/gluten-free/safe-to-eat pizza, and periodic study breaks with food you can eat! We also

collaborate to advocate for more dining options on campus. If you're interested in getting involved or have any questions, please email Ely Sibarium at [ely.sibarium@yale.edu](mailto:ely.sibarium@yale.edu).

### **Mind Matters**

Mind Matters is a student organization that works to create an open dialogue about mental health in the community by hosting guest speakers, arranging study breaks, screening films, and circulating newsletters. Student members advocate for positive mental health at Yale, working with peer liaisons and the Yale College Council to reduce the stigma associated with mental health and to educate students about the resources available to them. One of their largest events is Fresh Check Day, a mental health awareness fair hosted every year in the spring. Learn more at [mindmatters.sites.yale.edu](http://mindmatters.sites.yale.edu)

### **Good Life Center**

The Good Life Center, 4th floor of Byers Hall (in Silliman), hosts mental health workshops, craft nights, and more. For more information, visit their site at [yaleglc.com](http://yaleglc.com)

### **Yale Layer**

The Yale Layer is a student run magazine focused on mental health, with the intent to foster dialogue, personal narratives, and creative expression about mental health in order to shed light on the way the issue impacts the campus and the community. They publish a wide variety of writing such as poetry, personal essays, journalistic pieces, interviews, and more. In addition, they publish art of many mediums. Visit their website at [theyalelayer.com/about](http://theyalelayer.com/about)

### **ASLaY (DEFY Partner)**

American Sign Language at Yale, affectionately known as ASLaY, promotes the education of ASL and deaf culture at Yale. We lead advanced and beginner language tables to cultivate a community of signers and to give students a place to learn and practice ASL, ask questions, and get to know people with a common interest/experience. We also host movie nights and lead trips to deaf events (poetry slams, social events, etc). Regardless of your hearing status, there is no expectation that you know ASL, only that you are open to learning and exploring this cornerstone of Deaf culture. ASLaY is comprised mostly of Yale undergraduates and is also open to graduate students, faculty, and community members. Naturally, ASLaY is a great way for those who identify as deaf or hard-of-hearing to get to know each other, share experiences, and share resources (both at Yale and at large). If you would like to learn more or get involved, please contact Ely Sibarium at [ely.sibarium@yale.edu](mailto:ely.sibarium@yale.edu).

### **Project LETS**

Project LETS is a student chapter of the nationwide organization Let's Erase the Stigma, focused on reducing stigma associated with mental health struggles on college campuses. As of August 2019, they are not particularly active. Visit their website at [letserasethestigma.com/yale](http://letserasethestigma.com/yale)

**Diversability at Yale, or DAY (DEFY Partner)**

Diversability is the Yale faculty and staff affinity group for disability. Undergrads are not generally involved, though DEFY has partnered with them and plans to work with them on select advocacy/publicity projects. They have a useful list of resources that can be accessed here: [day.yale.edu/resources](http://day.yale.edu/resources)

**Pre-Orientation Programs**

Pre-orientation programs provide accommodations on a case-by-case basis. Some have infrastructure in place for students with disabilities. FOOT, for example, runs special peanut allergy trips and runs trips that are not fully backpacking but have a home base. Unfortunately, they do not communicate with SAS, so regardless of whether you are connected with SAS you will need to contact the program individually to find out if they are able to accommodate your needs and how.

**Conclusion**

In this document, we have provided at least some of the relevant information to having a disability at Yale. We know that everyone's experience is different. If you have any feedback on this guide, or want anything added, please contact the following students:

Mafalda von Alvensleben at [mafalda.vonalvensleben@yale.edu](mailto:mafalda.vonalvensleben@yale.edu)

Joaquín Lara Midkiff at [joaquin.laramidkiff@yale.edu](mailto:joaquin.laramidkiff@yale.edu)

Josie Steuer Ingall at [josie.steueringall@yale.edu](mailto:josie.steueringall@yale.edu)

There are many resources in place at Yale but many more changes are needed still. The disability community at Yale is growing and becoming more visible.

DEFY and the Disability Peer Mentors are here, and we will fight for you.