

## **How to handle attending a professional conference: Tips from survivors**

Survivors who have experience of attending professional conferences say they have learnt never to underestimate how tough this can be but also how much they have got out of going to them. In their opinion, the good points far outweigh the more difficult aspects. The important thing is to have coping strategies in place beforehand.

### **Coping strategies**

One option is to cope by using dissociative barriers to handle the actual event but this risks having to deal with the fall out afterwards.

The following alternatives have been suggested by survivors

- **PLAN**
- **PROTECT**
- **PROVIDE**

1. **PLAN** is about thinking through various scenarios that might arise and making a plan in advance. Ask any internal teams to make their contributions. Don't forget to plan the ending too - BOTH ends can be a challenging event!
2. **PROTECT** is about remembering that insider parts are your own to take care of and look after. There is no obligation at all to stay in a place that is too uncomfortable, answer uncomfortable questions, or go along with any plans or suggestions that don't feel OK.

### ***Self care comes first.***

As the conference organisers will probably point out, anyone can feel free to use the conference sessions, workshops, coffee breaks etc, as best suits them, whilst respecting others freedom to do the same. So taking time out, missing sessions, having a sleep, going for a walk or a drive, whatever helps is fine.

It can also be helpful if you have at least one other person at the conference who is aware of where you are planning to be at any given time, not out of compulsion or obligation, just out of connection and friendship.

3. **PROVIDE** is about taking along resources that might be helpful in soothing your system and keeping things manageable e.g mobile phone, toys, writing or drawing materials, books, music, photos, or whatever might provide familiar, safe soothing. And a conference is no time to stint on chocolate or other comfort foods either!

### **How to handle attending a conference where your therapist is also attending**

Each person will handle this very individually. It depends very much where you are at with your relationship with your therapist and how much co-consciousness you have. The main thing is to try and talk through with your therapist beforehand what everyone inside feels you might need to manage and what is going to be possible without blurring the boundaries too much.

One of the key things might be how to differentiate meeting up at a conference from what is dedicated time in therapy. Silence and avoidance between you and your therapist might be experienced by your insiders unbearable, so what can you both say and do that would be alright and still enable you to be in the same room as your therapist? For example, you can plan to meet up on arrival to say 'Hello' to one another and then go and talk to someone else.

Be very clear beforehand if your therapist is going to be your support during the conference or if you need to look at who is going to be available to you for this. Any misunderstanding would cause a lot of pain to the whole if you think your therapist is offering more than they are. Have a clear agreement beforehand about what is alright.

### **Add your notes and comments, including any agreement with your therapist**