



Disability Awareness: Inclusive Language and Practices

Linda Clemon-Karp | Northwest ADA Center | 2023 Washington State DEI Conference

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Learning Objectives

1. Develop a deeper understanding of ableism;
2. Become familiar with disability language and identity; and
3. Learn best practices for inclusive interactions.

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Today's Agenda

- Approach to content
- Ableism
- Disability language and identity
- Fundamentals of inclusive interactions
- References and resources
- Q & A

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Approach to Content

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Practice Brave Engagement

Choose courage over comfort. Commit to growth

Show up. Be vulnerable. Embrace discomfort. Stay present. Dare to fail.

Recognize comfort vs. safety

Feeling discomfort is not the same as feeling unsafe.

Stay open to new ideas

Welcome multiple viewpoints. Examine your own experiences. Recognize and honor those that differ from yours.

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Awareness Promotes Inclusion

Learning about disability language and identity increases inclusion through positive, respectful communication and interactions can:

- Challenge antiquated attitudes
- Help to remove societal barriers
- Break down isolation and segregation
- Give us tools and skills to better carry out the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), bringing us closer to full integration for people with disabilities.

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The Social Model of Disability AKA Sociopolitical

Disability is a problem with society

- Created by a person's interactions with environmental & societal barriers
- The person with the disability is the expert
- Individual with disability chooses language
 - Person First; Identity First; Personal Choice can include euphemisms, reclaimed language, words otherwise considered slurs

Remedy: "Nothing about us without us"

- Include people with disabilities in all areas of life

Disabled World, Models of Disability: Types and Definitions, www.disabled-world.com/definitions/disability-models.php
Society for Disability Studies, <http://disstudies.org/>

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Ableism

Societally constructed and internal bias

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ableism noun
 able·ism | \ˈā-bə-, li-zəm \

A type of discrimination in which able-bodied individuals are viewed as normal and superior to those with a disability, resulting in prejudice toward the latter. ¹

“...often rests on the assumption that disabled people need to be ‘fixed’ in one form or the other... Ableism is intertwined in our culture, due to many limiting beliefs about what disability does or does not mean...” ²

- Bias based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence & excellence
- Presents systemically, culturally and interpersonally

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ableism>

² Leah Smith, Center for Disability Rights, <https://cdrnys.org/blog/uncategorized/ableism/>

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Expectations of People with Disabilities

“I want to live in a world where we don't have such low expectations of disabled people that we are congratulated for getting out of bed and remembering our own names in the morning.”

– Stella Young, comedian & writer



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Media representations of disability



PORNOGRAPHY:

The objectification of one group of people for the benefit of another group of people.

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Inspiration Porn

People who don't have disabilities use images of people with disabilities to inspire or motivate them



Stella Young TED Talk, <https://youtu.be/8K9Gg164Bsw?t=10>

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Microaggressions defined

“The everyday slights, insults, putdowns, invalidations, and offensive behaviors that people experience in daily interactions with... individuals who may be unaware that they have engaged in demeaning ways.”¹

“A comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group”²

¹ Adapted from Racial Microaggressions in Everyday Life, www.cpedv.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/how_to_be_an_effective_ally-lessons_learned_microaggressions.pdf

² Merriam-Webster Dictionary, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/microaggression

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Impacts of microaggressions

"To be clear, the "micro" in microaggression doesn't mean that these acts can't have big, life-changing impacts. They can" ¹



- Microaggressions reflect social bias and enforce social prejudice
- Well-intentioned comments can be the most difficult to identify and challenge
- Multiple microaggressions add up like a repetitive strain injury

¹ [Andrew Limbong, NPR](https://www.npr.org/2020/06/08/872371063/microaggressions-are-a-big-deal-how-to-talk-them-out-and-when-to-walk-away), URL: [npr.org/2020/06/08/872371063/microaggressions-are-a-big-deal-how-to-talk-them-out-and-when-to-walk-away](https://www.npr.org/2020/06/08/872371063/microaggressions-are-a-big-deal-how-to-talk-them-out-and-when-to-walk-away)

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Ableist Microaggressions

Unsolicited Medical Advice

"Have you tried Yoga?"

Recovery is the Only Option

"I pray they'll find a cure for you soon."

Denial of Disability Experience

"Well, everyone has some disability."

Accusations of Faking

"I've seen you walk. You're taking that parking space from someone who really needs it."

Policing Language

"I wish you wouldn't call yourself disabled."

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Alternatives to ableist language

Consider: What are you really trying to say?

Choose words that more accurately express what you mean. Be creative!

The crowd at the concert was totally bananas!

Wild, unruly, out of control

Her excuses were very uncool.

Disappointing, old, clichéd, hackneyed, worn out, boring, dull, pointless

Everything he said in that meeting was senseless.

Illogical, irrational, obtuse, inane, uninformed, ridiculous

The weather has been really erratic!

Mercurial, unpredictable, indecisive, changeable, inconsistent

[Autistic Hoya, Lydia X. Z. Brown: Ableism/Language](http://www.autistichoya.com/p/ableist-words-and-terms-to-avoid.html), URL: www.autistichoya.com/p/ableist-words-and-terms-to-avoid.html

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Moving toward better communication

1. Allow yourself to be uncomfortable –
Stay engaged and open!
2. It's all right to make mistakes –
Accept responsibility.
3. Take your lead from the person with a disability –
Ask for input!

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Disability Language and Identity

For inclusive communication

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The opposite of wheelchair bound



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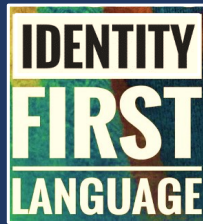
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Current Disability Language Models



A person with a disability



A disabled person

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Person First



- A PERSON comes BEFORE a DISABILITY
 - Person with a disability
 - People who have disabilities
- Affirms one's value separate from disability
- Default to this language model
- Use in professional writing and speaking
- Respect Individual language choice

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Why Some Prefer Person-First

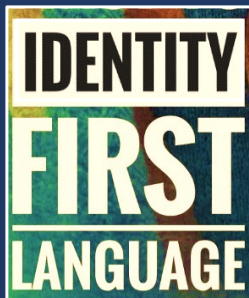
“Using a diagnosis as a defining characteristic reflects prejudice, and also robs the person of the opportunity to define him [or] herself.”

– Trudy Jacobson, *The Arc*



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Identity-First



- Disability is mentioned first: “Disabled person”
- Disability is an integral part of a person’s identity
- Recognizes, validates & affirms one’s identity as a disabled person

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Why Some Prefer Identity-First Language



Ballerinas or People who do ballet?

“You use Identity First Language for the things you consider positive...

If you start using Person First Language when referring to everyone, then I will join you. For example, “You are a person with femaleness... Are you a person with religiousness?”

– Amy Sequenzia, Activist

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Professional writing and speaking

- Relevance?
- Use a person’s name
- Person first: a person is not a disability
- **Honor individuals’ language preferences!**

- ✓ Disability IS the term
 - Euphemisms
 - Antiquated language
- ✗ Inspiration porn
 - Hero stories
 - Teajerkers



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Person Centered Language

“Ultimately, the key is to ask... how a person chooses to identify, rather than making assumptions or imposing your own beliefs.”

– Emily Ladau, writer & activist

What language do you use to describe yourself?

I'm autistic and blind.

Cool. Should I use that language to describe you too?

Yes please!

Thanks! Will do!

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Fundamentals of Inclusive Interactions

Best practices for positive, respectful interactions

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Navigating Toward Better Interactions

- Allow yourself to be uncomfortable
- It's all right to make mistakes
- Take your lead from the person with a disability



Foundations of Inclusive Interactions

1. Don't make assumptions
2. Respect individuality and autonomy
3. Allow time for mutual understanding
4. Treat adults as adults

Don't Make Assumptions

People with disabilities are the best judges of what they can or can't do

- Ask before helping
- Get instructions
- Don't over-assist
- If you must assume something, assume the person is competent

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A few words about helping



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Respect Individuality & Autonomy

Presume competence!

- Talk to me directly, rather than to someone who's with me
- Make eye contact & speak at a normal volume
- Be friendly: have a conversation, like with anyone else

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An uncomfortable visit with the doctor



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Time for Mutual Understanding: Make the time!

- Be patient
 - Listen
 - Don't interrupt
 - Give people time to respond
- Use plain language
- Adjust your communication style based on the person's actions and reactions (not before)
- Consider and adopt alternative communication methods

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A positive visit with the doctor



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Treat Adults as Adults

- An adult with a disability is NOT a child
- Use age-appropriate language & tone
- Treat others how you'd want them to treat you
- Do not touch people without permission; don't pat people on the head

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What About Curious Children?

“Your kids are going to stare. And that's perfectly okay... If you tell them not to stare or discourage them from asking questions... you're teaching them that looking different is something to be ashamed of. It's not.”

– Stella Young



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Review of Inclusion Basics

Don't make assumptions.
 Respect individual autonomy.
 Practice patience.
 Treat adults as adults.
 And if you don't know –

Just ask!

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What if I say or do the wrong thing?

1. Allow yourself to be uncomfortable
Stay engaged and open!
2. It's all right to make mistakes
Accept responsibility.
3. Take your lead from the person with a disability
Ask for input!



Remember
to use
your
compass!

“Thank you for telling me. How can I do better?”

“I didn't know. What should I do or say instead?”

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Just treat us the way you want to be treated



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References & Resources and Q&A

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Language & Inclusion Resources

[National Center on Disability & Journalism: Language Style Guide](https://ncdj.org/style-guide/), URL: ncdj.org/style-guide/

[Disability Writing & Journalism Guidelines, Center for Disability Rights](https://cdnys.org/disability-writing-journalism-guidelines/), URL: cdnys.org/disability-writing-journalism-guidelines/

[Guidelines for Writing about People with Disabilities](https://adata.org/factsheet/ADANN-writing), URL: adata.org/factsheet/ADANN-writing

[How to Write and Report About People with Disabilities](https://rtcil.org/products/media/guidelines), URL: rtcil.org/products/media/guidelines

[Disability Etiquette Gone Wrong](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGMoPUNfgw), URL: www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGMoPUNfgw

[Disability Etiquette: Tips On Interacting With People With Disabilities](https://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf), URL: <https://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>

[Respectful Interactions: Disability Language and Etiquette](https://nwadacenter.org/factsheet/respectful-interactions-disability-language-and-etiquette), URL: nwadacenter.org/factsheet/respectful-interactions-disability-language-and-etiquette

[Responsive Practice, University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability](https://iod.unh.edu/projects/new-hampshire-disability-public-health-project/responsive-practice-healthcare-providers), URL: iod.unh.edu/projects/new-hampshire-disability-public-health-project/responsive-practice-healthcare-providers

Ableism & History Resources

[Stella Young TED Talk](https://ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much?language=en), URL: ted.com/talks/stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much?language=en

[Ableism in Language](https://impactnw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Ableism-in-Language.pdf) by Lydia X.Z. Brown, URL: impactnw.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Ableism-in-Language.pdf

[Ableism Bingo: Things to Never Say to a Disabled Person](https://yoppvoice.com/2020/07/30/ableism-bingo-things-to-never-say-to-a-disabled-person/), URL: yoppvoice.com/2020/07/30/ableism-bingo-things-to-never-say-to-a-disabled-person/

[10 Principles of Disability Justice; Sins Invalid](https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice), URL: <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice>

[Kimberlé Crnshaw; What is Intersectionality?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViDtnfQ9FHc), URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViDtnfQ9FHc>

[Disability History Museum](https://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/index.html), URL: www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/index.html

[A History of Disability from 1050 to the Present Day](https://historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/disability-history/), URL: historicengland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/disability-history/

[Smithsonian National Museum of American History](https://americanhistory.si.edu/topics/disability-history), URL: americanhistory.si.edu/topics/disability-history

Video Credits

[Ableism is The Bane of My M****f****n! Existence](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeImZUXBlq0&t=169s), No Body Is Disposable Video Series, Sins Invalid & Barnard Center for Research on Woman, URL: [youtube.com/watch?v=IeImZUXBlq0&t=169s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IeImZUXBlq0&t=169s)

[Disability Sensitivity Training Video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gv1aDEFIXq8), dcgovernment, URL: [youtube.com/watch?v=Gv1aDEFIXq8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gv1aDEFIXq8)

[Responsive Practice: Providing Health Care & Screenings to Individuals with Disabilities, and Accessible & Adaptive Communication](https://iod.unh.edu/projects/new-hampshire-disability-public-health-project/responsive-practice-healthcare-providers), University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability, URL: iod.unh.edu/projects/new-hampshire-disability-public-health-project/responsive-practice-healthcare-providers

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Questions about this presentation?

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