
Anti-ableism Dictionary

Passion4Social



Ableism

[ay-buh-liz-uhm]

(exp)

Having an **ablest** attitude is a form of disability discrimination. It refers to a mind-set that regards disabled people as being somehow damaged or incomplete. It often results in the disabled person being disadvantaged, i.e. missing out on opportunities to climb the career ladder due to misconceptions about their abilities.

To avoid having an ablest attitude, the best thing to do is to **never assume**. Try not to push your own thoughts or feelings onto a disabled person; take the time to find out their wants and needs. Do your best to include them and make them feel valued; do not exclude them because it would be easier for you.

Internalised Ableism

This occurs when a person starts to believe they are less worthy because of their disability. Negative feelings are projected on to their inner selves, usually as a result of microaggressions or social prejudices, and they begin behaving accordingly.

(e.g)

- 🧠 Not allowing themselves to use aids in public for fear of attracting unwanted attention.
- 🧠 Not wanting to discuss accommodations and reasonable adjustments with employers through fear of being dismissed, being considered (awkward), or even passed over for promotions.
- 🧠 Reluctance to consider themselves as disabled because they have been dismissed by others who don't take their accommodation needs seriously.

Social model of disability



The social model of Disability is a way of **viewing the world which was developed by disabled people**. It says that people are disabled by the physical and attitudinal barriers society puts in their way, rather than their impairment or difference.

Vs



Medical model of disability

The outdated medical model is often used to **justify discrimination or microaggressions**; the **“You don’t look disabled”** argument harks back to this. For example, approaching people in the street and challenging them on why they are using disabled services (such as bathrooms and parking spots).

Functioning labels

These terms are most often used in reference to people on the **autistic spectrum** and are inaccurate to say the least! Autism, like most other disabilities, is too complex to be described in such an arbitrary way.

Terms like these are often used to convey how disruptive society at large finds the autistic person in question, rather than referring to their capability to complete a task and serve no useful purpose.



High functioning
Low functioning



High support needs
Low support needs
Additional support
needs

(n.b)

How one autistic person experiences a situation will probably differ completely to that of another, and what an autistic person is able to do with ease one day, may prove more challenging the next.

Diffability or differently abled

Disability is a fact of life, do not be afraid to use the word!

this!

These terms equate disability with negativity.

We all have different abilities, regardless of disability or not. There is no need to draw attention specifically to disabled people by using a term like this.

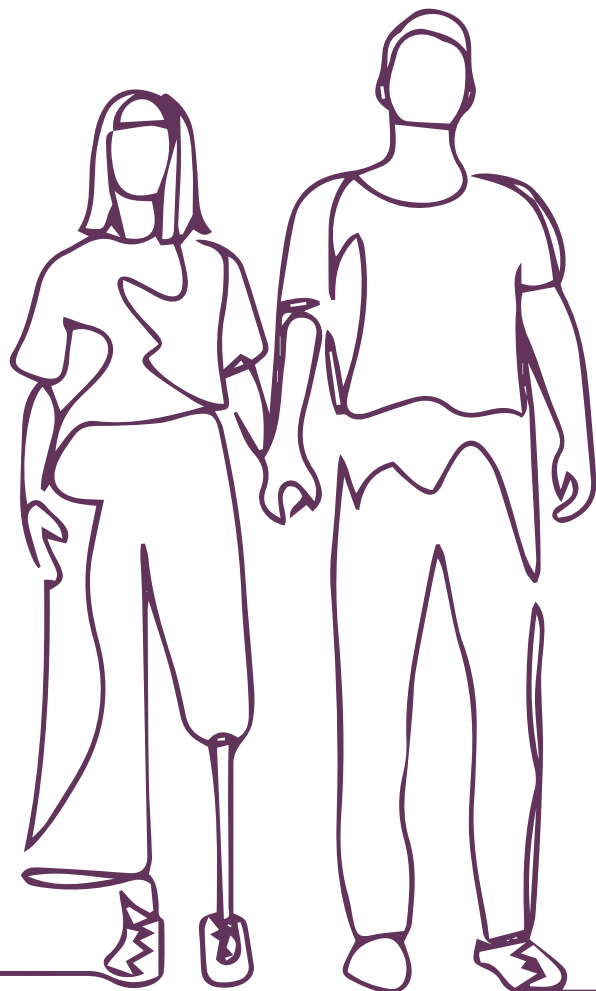


Pay attention to how the disabled person refers to themselves or even ask them what term they prefer.

Person with a disability or disabled person is factually correct.

Interabled relationship

Whether a relationship consists of disabled people, non-disabled people or a mix of the two; it is a relationship. They do not need to be marked out as being different.



Microaggressions

[mahy-kroh-uh-gresh-uhn]

Microaggressions are subtle, every-day prejudices, stereotypes or behaviours, - verbal and non-verbal, that are directed at someone with a protected characteristic, i.e. disability, race and sexuality. Whether microaggressions are committed consciously, or not, they can nonetheless be harmful and chip away at someone's confidence and mental well-being over a period of time.

In this dictionary, we are looking at strategies to deal with the biggest ablest microaggression experienced by people with disabilities...

Unintentional, often
well-meaning
comments can in fact
negatively impact
someone, to the point
where they would avoid
talking about their
disability or drawing any
sort of attention to it.
Altogether.



The first step to
changing the
ablest micro
aggressions
mind-set is for
society to
recognise its
existence and
how harmful
it can be.

“I don’t even think of you as disabled”

Thinking that it is a compliment to say that someone doesn't seem to be disabled is a premise to saying that having a disability is bad or must be hidden.

That's far from the truth!

This statement although innocent and well intentioned; can undervalue a disabled person's achievements.

Saying that you don't see someone as disabled can seem positive as it suggests that they are just seen as “one of the gang” but it may have negative connotations too, i.e. it also suggests that the disabled person does not have to overcome any barriers in the workplace etc.

“Were you born like that, is it a disease or was it an accident?”



Think: Why do you need this information? Is it just curiosity? Is it appropriate to ask for the information? Are you close enough to the person to ask a question like this?

Just like you; the person **may not feel comfortable sharing information that relates to their health** or personal circumstances. So, when trying to find out more about a person's disability, it is best to **tread carefully**.

If you need to know for the purposes of a job interview for example, you could ask a question such as...

“Would you be comfortable with me asking ...?”

“Would you mind telling me a bit more about your disability?”

Don't be too blunt or start making assumptions.



“I thought you were normal”

Around 1 billion people globally live with some form of disability which equates to 15% of the population. Disabled people are in fact the largest minority group within society; yet despite this, just 45 countries across the globe have anti-discrimination or disability laws in place.

Categorising one person as normal is ignoring the diversity of bodies, minds, people, perspectives and values that make up the population and there is nothing positive to be gained from thinking this way. The evidence to show that **people with disabilities bring unique skills and experience to the workplace** is overwhelming, yet in some countries, as much as **80% of the working age disabled population is not in employment.**

This is an extremely offensive statement to make to a disabled person.

Disability is not a taboo subject and people should not be afraid to talk about it.

The only thing we should be normalising is talking about disability!

“Poor person. They have a disability”
(nooooooooooo!)

People with disabilities must never be addressed as if they were lesser human beings nor infantilised. Speak to them as the people they are: people who have successes and failures, flaws and qualities, desires, frustrations, dreams and problems.

No need to pity or praise a disabled person for simply living their lives.

Katrina McAinsh, Digital Marketing assistant with Passion4Social:



One example I, as a wheelchair user, can think of here is when I am out in my wheelchair or mobility scooter. I just want to go about my daily business like everyone else and if I need help with anything, I will ask. I don't want someone to do it for me because they feel sorry for me.

“The blind leading the blind”

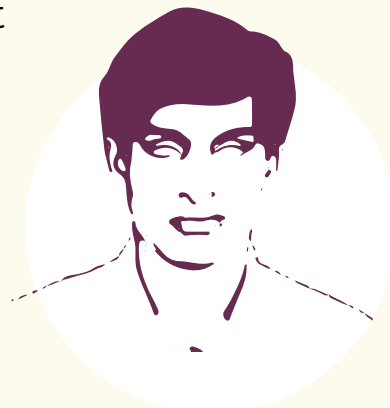
Generally, an expression like this that has been widely used for generations is not considered to be offensive, but some people within the disability community believe it reinforces the negative perception that blind people are unable to take on leadership roles or that they are incapable of reading a situation.

So just bear this in mind.

(e.g)

Srikanth Bolla,

is a 30-year-old CEO of a company with a value of £48 million, proving that this preconception is completely unfounded.



“My words fell on deaf ears”

As with the example above, this is not perceived as being offensive by many disabled people; however some might feel it reinforces the negative assumption that Deaf people are somehow passive or ignorant.



Deafness is an involuntary state of being, with no two people's experience being the same, and has nothing to do with wilfully ignoring advice.



Try to avoid using this expression if you can.



“they chose to ignore my advice”

is more appropriate.

“That person is wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair”

This is a completely outdated and offensive term. Disabled people may use wheelchairs for different reasons and contrary to commonly held beliefs, wheelchair users regard their wheelchair as a means to living independently, or to freedom.

It is society who is placing perceived confines or constraints on them by somehow viewing using a wheelchair as less than walking. You should also remember that not every wheelchair user is paralysed.

A wheelchair is an assistive aid, not a prison where the person is stuck or trapped, so always use the term (wheelchair user)



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“They have special needs”

Disabled People are no more or less needy than non-disabled people. We all need love, care, shelter etc. People living with disabilities may have additional support needs its true, but they are only viewed as special because society is largely designed to cater to so-called “normality”

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“They are an invalid”

This word is outdated, highly inaccurate and very offensive to disabled people. It is such a general term that it could never describe the impact of a person's disability on their lives and worse still, it suggests that they are lacking in capability.

There are no suggested alternatives.
Just don't use it!

“He/she suffers with....”

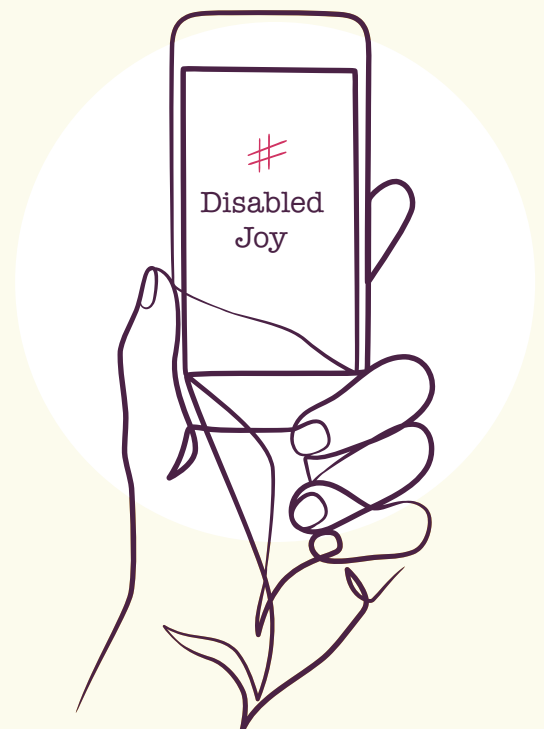
Using verbs like (suffers from) reinforces the negative stereotype that disability is always associated with poor quality of life and must be pitied.

People with disabilities get plenty of fulfilment from life and it is society who fixate on the negatives.

(e.g)

Andrew Farkash

created the hashtag **#DisabledJoy** to show that, in spite of common misconceptions, disabled people experience joy often stemming from their disabilities.



“You don’t have a real disability”

“there are plenty of people worse off than you”

It’s not a competition!

No-one could truly know the challenges a disabled person faces each day, or understand how they impact them, without walking a mile in their shoes.

Some members of society believe that claiming benefits is easy. The reality is that many disabled people find the whole process demeaning, struggle with the increased cost of living, or face long waits to be believed by assessment services.



Remember that all disabilities are real and be kind!

“Able-bodied”

This makes a negative distinction between disabled and non-disabled people by implying that disabled people's bodies are somehow imperfect or broken.

That they cannot use them effectively because they are weak and unfit. This is **simply not true**, with countless adaptive sports and workouts, ensuring that there are plenty of people with physical disabilities who are healthier than their non-disabled counterparts.



Use
non-disabled
instead.

How did you lose your leg?

“Why do you only have one arm?”

First and foremost, the person is neither (less than), nor (without) because they have a limb difference!

Whether they were born with one, or it came about later in life; given the support they need, there is no reason why they will not achieve everything in their work/ home lives that the rest of society does.



Remember!

Someone's limb difference may not be a subject they are comfortable discussing with a stranger.

There is too often a **burden of expectation on disabled people to answer the public's questions** which can sometimes be overly personal and intrusive.

“Why don’t you wear a prosthetic?”

“Why don’t you want to try look more *normal*?”

These questions fall into the same category as the previous example. Likewise, they both raise the question of ‘normality’.

What is normal for some is not normal for others. How the person in question decides to present themselves is entirely their own decision and they shouldn’t be burdened by society’s fears, misgivings or discomforts.

this! →

We need to broaden our horizons of what ‘**normal**’ is and stop assuming this is a goal everyone wants to achieve!

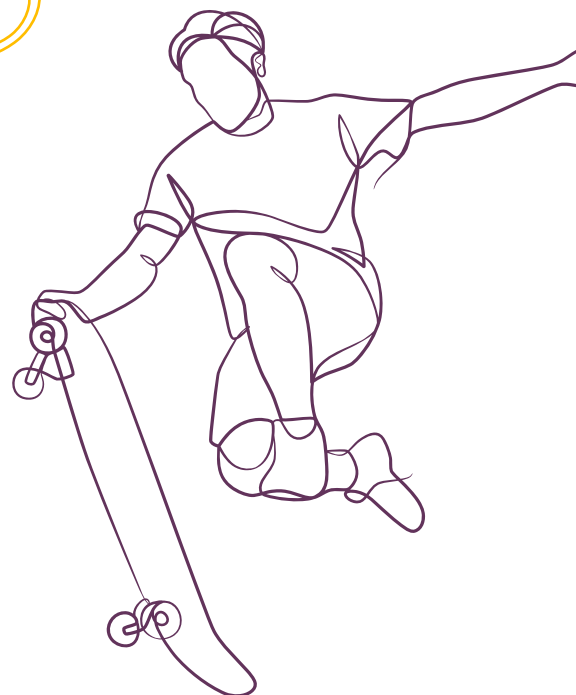
“You are inspirational”

Everyone has a unique talent and could be described as inspirational in some way. There is no need to objectify disabled people for other's benefit. They do not achieve amazing things simply because they are disabled.

(e.g)

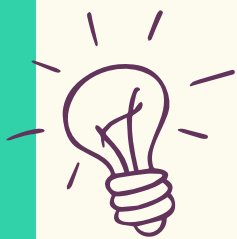
A Paralympic athlete is an athlete who just happens to have a disability.

Inspirational is a term that is overused generally, but should definitely never be used to describe a disabled person who is simply living their life.



“Do you think they will ever find a cure for your condition?”

Disabilities are not diseases and therefore do not have cures. It is true that some disabilities or conditions can be managed better with medication or surgeries, but the majority of disabilities are lifelong.



Who says the person wants to be cured anyway?

Most disabled people view their disability as being part of their unique identity and although they wouldn't necessarily define themselves by it, it is nonetheless important.

“So and so is very good to you/does a lot for you”

Whilst it may well be true that a family member or friend provides practical support to someone with a disability on occasion (some people with disabilities need more support than others); there is no reason why that person should feel any more grateful to have their company.

These words take away from relationships disabled people have, i.e. the same ones as everyone else on the planet, by somehow suggesting that they have nothing to contribute.

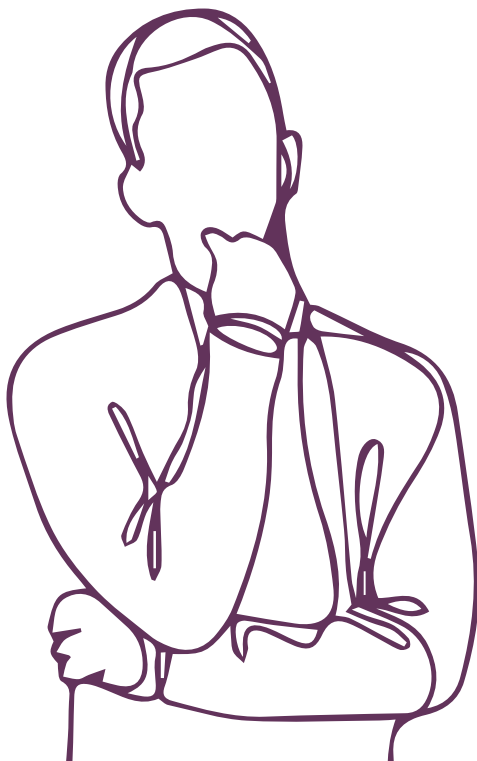
No relationship is one sided and the person providing assistance most likely does so because they enjoy the other person's company.



“Stop using your disability as an excuse!”

Whilst disabilities shouldn't ever be used to excuse bad behaviour; often when a disabled person expresses discomfort at participating in an activity, it's probably for a legitimate reason and should be respected.

Just because you can't understand someone's perspective, or see them visibly struggle, doesn't mean their complaint is not valid or that they are being untruthful.



People often become so effective at masking certain aspects of their disability because of the pressures that society's attitudes place on them that it is impossible to know the challenges or inner turmoil they might be facing.



Try not to judge and ask if there is any support you can give to facilitate the person's inclusion in an activity.



However, always remember to do this in a respectful considerate way, not aggressively!

“Everyone is a little bit....”

“we all get like that sometimes”

If someone discloses a diagnosis, replying with a phrase like this one is dismissive of their experiences, insensitive, and hurtful. In fact it can be perceived as a microaggression.



Remember that often it takes a lot of trust for a person to openly talk about medical issues.



Respectfully ask how their diagnosis affects them, what you can do to accommodate their needs and even if there is more information you could find to learn more.

“Yes, they are fine thanks.”

Speaking for or speaking over a person with lived experience of a disability is extremely frustrating, not to say disrespectful, regardless of how well intentioned it may be. Unless a person's disability means they have difficulty communicating, there is no reason why they would not want to participate fully in a conversation.

Socialising is just as much a part of disabled people's lives as non-disabled people's - when physical or attitudinal barriers don't get in the way.

Everyone's experience of disability is unique and they deserve to have their voices heard, same as anyone else.



Two people might live with the same condition but their daily experiences and symptoms will more than likely differ considerably, so it's always worth listening to the individual.



(N.b)

Whilst it is also important to listen to carers' experiences; their experience isn't the same as the disabled persons and so shouldn't be treated as such.

“How is ... doing today?”

Following on from the example above, speaking to a disabled person's companion rather than them, or conversing with the disabled person using loud, over exaggerated, slow baby talk is both patronising and extremely irritating.

No need to cover old ground about socialising being just as much a part of disabled people's lives as anyone else's given the equal access and opportunities.

In most cases, the person will have no issues comprehending what is being said to them and even if they did, they would clearly say so.



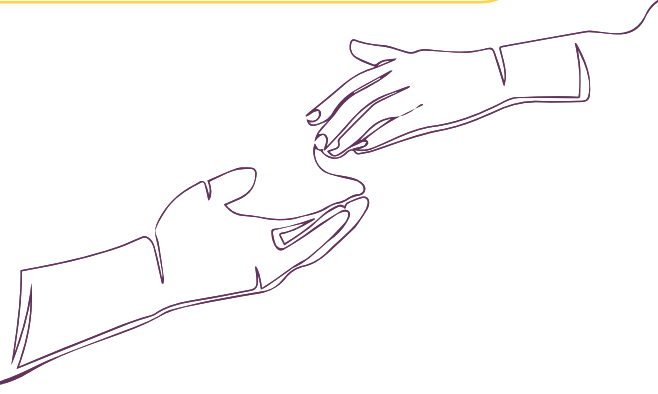
Relax and speak as
you would to
anyone else.

Don't assume the person
doesn't enjoy many of
the same experiences as
you do, but equally don't
worry about being too pc.

Guaranteed, it will be a
much better experience
all round.

“Let me help you with...”

The question of whether or not to offer your assistance to a person with a disability can be tricky for some people.



It is an urban myth that you should never offer because it offends. Trust us, there will be many occasions when a small act of kindness from a stranger literally makes all the difference and the recipient is glad for it.

Assuming a person needs help because they have a visible disability, without assessing the situation fully or asking them first however, can be irritating and even counterproductive.

People with disabilities adapt to the challenges their condition throws up and develop strategies for doing more than you might assume. They are also more aware of their own limits and can voice when they want help.

The key is to respectfully ask first and never be pushy. If someone politely refuses, do not be offended.

“You are so pretty
...for a disabled
person...”

Disability and beauty/being attractive are sadly still concepts that society can struggle to associate with each other.

Disability equates to ugly or unattractive for some people and that just frankly makes **no sense on any level**.

Apart from that, we can all be attractive in many diverse ways, so why should disabled people be any different?



Newsflash!
We like to look
good too!

It is as easy as this...

- 👉 You look great today...
- 👉 I love your look...
- 👉 How do you get your hair to sit so perfectly?

and finally---

We are not monsters or Ghoulies!



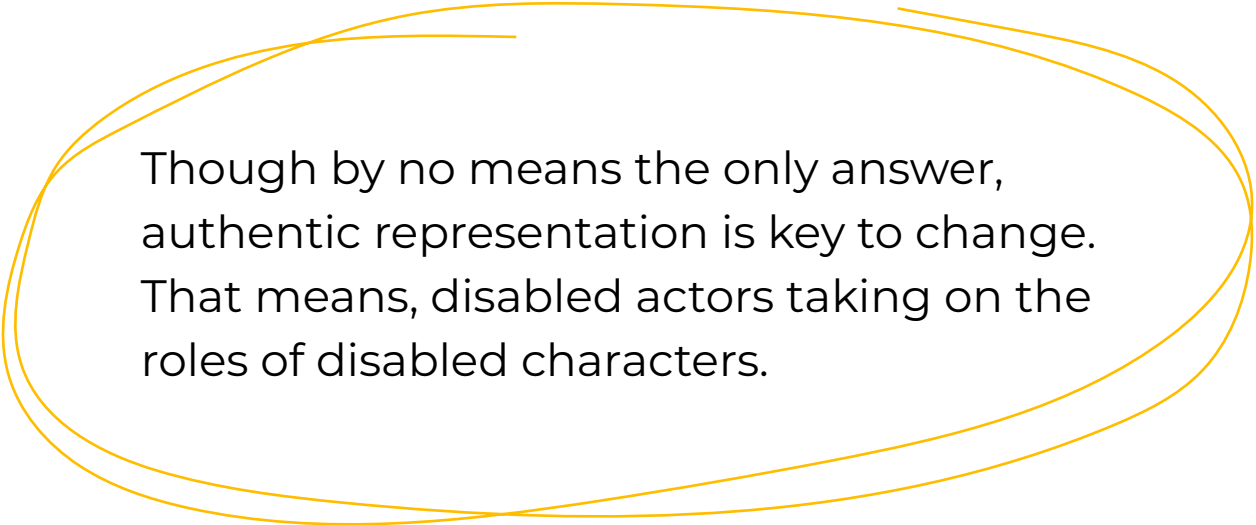
Representations matter because they influence how society views different communities.

Far too often fictional villains are written and portrayed as having a (difference).

Either that is having physical differences (such as wheelchair users) or physiological differences, (mental health issues- such as schizophrenia or an intellectual disability).

Unfortunately this only adds to the societal stigma around disabilities and affects the self-esteem of individuals who may identify as having the same disability as the characters depicted on screen.

The simplistic approach to how disability is portrayed in film and television, using facial differences to draw a comparison between good and evil for example, is a deep rooted narrative that needs to change.



Though by no means the only answer, authentic representation is key to change. That means, disabled actors taking on the roles of disabled characters.

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