

# HOW TO BE AN ALLY



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## Introduction

This booklet is just a start to understand the best way to support people with disabilities as an ally. With that in mind, remember everyone is an individual.

Everyone needs support. Children with disabilities rely on their family and staff for support. Sometimes as people with disabilities grow older the type of support changes. This booklet is to recognize that people with disabilities have the same rights as everyone else. Here are some tools for how to be an Ally. - Julie Petty

# What is an Ally?

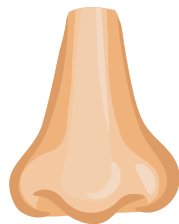
An ally is someone who supports the voices of a marginalized group —

- women,
- people of color
- people with disabilities,
- people in the LGBTQ community,
- people with low income, etc. —

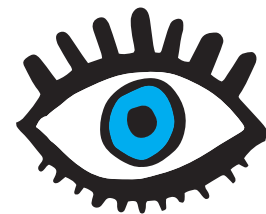
With compassion and understanding allies use their privilege to learn from that group and amplify their voices or cause.



A mouth to speak out against injustice



A nose to sniff out implicit bias



Eyes to identify privilege



Ears to listen to the person's with disabilities experience



A heart to cultivate empathy for the oppressed



Hands to take action and make a change

# Why Do We Need Allies?

People with disabilities have been oppressed throughout history.

- Oppression is unjust treatment or practices that limit basic human rights.
- People who support people with disabilities usually have good intentions but have also been part of these systems of unjust treatment
- History has exposed many of these problem practices and violations
- When independence and education is not provided, it may contribute to the oppression that people with disabilities experience and result in unjust practices continuing.
- Lack of information makes it hard for people with disabilities to use their voices and make informed decisions.
- Unjust treatment and practices still occur today, but change has been happening.

The Disability Rights Movement and Self-Advocacy Movement gave people with disabilities a voice.

Allies are needed to support the movement and make change.



# Power and Control

Allies need to understand equality and its role in status, rights and opportunities.

- We must recognize the role that power plays in our systems.
- People with disabilities are just like everyone else and should be treated as such.
- Using your power and/or privilege is part of the problem.
- This contributes to nondisabled privilege resulting in the devaluation of people with disabilities.

We should common ground and work together to make changes.  
This is called Power With.

## Power Over

The most recognized form is power, 'power over'.

- It has many negative associations such as repression, force, coercion, discrimination, corruption, and abuse.
- Power is seen as one side winning and one side losing, a win-lose kind of relationship.
- It involves taking it from someone else, and then, using it to dominate and prevent others from gaining it.
- In the absence of positive role models and information on healthy relationships, people express or repeat the 'power over' pattern in their personal relationships, communities, institutions and work places.

One can see how this type of power is problematic for supporting rights.



# Power and Control

## Power Within

Power within is internal and personal power.

- It expresses itself by a person having the confidence to speak up for what they want and what they need.
- It contributes to a persons sense of self worth, self knowledge, and personal goals.
- It increases the ability to imagine and have HOPE.

Power within creates power with.

## Power With

Involves finding common ground with others and building collective strength.

- It is based on mutual support and collaboration,.
- It is based on mutual support and collaboration.
- Power with provides a container to multiply people's individual ideas, talents and knowledge collectively.
- This type of power unites and helps to create systemic change and support rights.
- An organization can adopt POWER WITH as a value that they have and work towards.
- To do this they must understand equality and the dynamics of power and control.

Allies have a role to play in power with!



# Learn more about disability, ableism, and disability rights.

## Disability

Disability is a natural part of the human experience that in no way takes away a person's right to fully participate in all aspects of society.

- Opportunities to take part in society on an equal level with others should be available without social and environmental barriers.

This includes the right to:

- be treated with respect,
- exert control and choice over our own lives,
- live where and with whom we choose,
- develop friendships and relationships,
- live free of violence and other forms of abuse,
- pursue gainful employment,
- receive supports that strengthen families,
- receive quality education in inclusive settings,
- participate in and contribute to our communities, and
- pursue our own dreams.

Everyone with a disability is different.

Even if someone has the same disability, they may have very different needs.

"Recognize that our disability is not who we are, but it is part of our identity."  
- Anna Corbitt



# Learn more about disability, ableism, and disability rights.

## Ableism

Ableism is a type of prejudice and discrimination directed toward people with disabilities.

- It includes attitudes, beliefs, and practices demonstrate a preference for being nondisabled.
- Ableism comes in many forms.
- It can be a direct insult, like making fun of someone or name-calling or it can be more subtle.
- Sometimes even a comment that on the surface sounds kind, reveals underlying ableism.

This is because many people may have unconscious biases about disability.

## Examples of Ableism

- Being uncomfortable around people with disabilities. People often think staring is impolite but taking extra care NOT to stare is ableism. You're trying to act like the person doesn't exist.
- Making assumptions based on a person because of their disability, like assuming a wheelchair user is good at computers, a blind person plays piano.
- Avoiding interacting with people with disabilities altogether for fear of making a mistake. Choosing an inaccessible venue for a meeting or event, therefore excluding some participants
- Making a movie, video, or presentation that doesn't have audio description or closed captioning.

## Disability Rights

The disability rights movement is a global social movement that seeks to secure equal opportunities and equal rights for all people with disabilities.





# Language = Perception

The way you speak about people with disabilities informs the way you perceive them.

- “Those poor people!” – This form of ableism gives off the perception that people with disabilities need to be pitied.
- They should to be respected and understood just like everybody else.
- People with disabilities ARE NOT special.

It is best to start by asking the person what they prefer, but here are some examples of better language.

## Examples of respectful language:

- People First Language:
  - He is a person with intellectual disabilities or developmental disabilities.
  - They are people with disabilities.
  - My daughter is a person with Austim.
  - She is a person with Down Syndrome.
  - He uses a wheelchair.
- Identity First Language:
  - Disabled person, Disabled parent, Autistic, Deaf Person

## Examples of disrespectful language:

- **Words:** Retarded, Deaf and dumb, Deaf mute, Invalid, Limited, Defects, Wheelchair bound, Confined to a wheelchair, Victim of, Suffering from, Deformed, Normal, High Functioning, Low Functioning
- **Euphemisms:** disABILITY, Handicapable, Differently abled, Physically challenged, Special needs

# Listen to and amplify the voices of disability activists.

Self-advocacy is a movement led by people with disabilities. This movement is based on a simple idea: individuals don't have to change to fit society. Rather, society must change to treat everyone fairly.

- The goal of self-advocacy is to reshape society.
- Self-Advocates work to bring basic civil rights and equality to all.
- The Self Advocacy Movement is working against negative stereotypes about people with disabilities that often-become oppressive social norms.

## Things to Remember

- Do not speak for someone with a disability - speak with and support.
- Do not take over - Even if you feel like someone needs help - practice a pause and wait until you are asked for help.
- If you are advocating for people with disabilities, model the way and take someone with a disability with you.
- Read, watch, and support content produced by people with disabilities.
- Stay informed on what disability organizations are good in the eyes of people with disabilities, and which ones might not be so great.
- Support activists with disabilities who are fighting for their rights.



# Examine your nondisabled privilege.

"Privilege is unearned access to resources only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged social group membership."

## Examples of Nondisabled Privilege:

- Nondisabled people don't have to deal with unwanted attention to their disability status.
- Nondisabled people do not have to worry about people questioning them about having children or being parents
- Nondisabled people are more likely to be given early opportunities to show what they can do at work, be identified as potential candidates for promotion, be mentored, be given a second chance when they fail, and be allowed to treat failure as a learning experience rather than as an indication of who they are.
- Nondisabled people can live an everyday life without people being surprised due to their abilities.
- Nondisabled people are less likely to be segregated into living situations—such as nursing homes and special schools and sports programs—that isolate them from job opportunities, schools, community services, and the everyday workings of life in society.

Taken from: <https://olc.sfu.ca/blog/nondisabled-privilege-what-it>

Think about all the privileges a nondisabled person might have.

- Recognizing those privileges and the historical oppression of people with disabilities will allow you to better advocate for equality for all.
- This is being an Ally.

"Disability doesn't make you exceptional, but questioning what you think about it does." - Stella Young

# Notice and work to alter your biases and assumptions.

All of us have a natural human tendency to sort people into groups based on characteristics such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and religion.

Implicit Bias or unconscious bias refers to attitudes or beliefs that occur outside of our conscious awareness and control.

- Implicit biases are shaped by our personal experiences, the attitudes of family, friends and others, living and working environments, culture, the media, movies, and books.
- Implicit biases develop over the course of a lifetime, beginning at an early age.

## How to counteract implicit bias:

- Engage with people with disabilities. Getting to know people one-on-one can reduce stereotyping and change negative social norms.
- Take the perspective of the person. Try to understand from their perspective what they encounter and what adaptive techniques they might use to have a quality life.
- Reflect on your perceptions, judgments, behavior, decisions, and actions to better understand which ones are worthy of a more thoughtful consideration rather than a split-second reaction.
- Focus on what you have in common with the individual members of the groups you are stereotyping.
- Continuously self-monitor your perceptions, judgments, behavior, decisions, and actions for the influence of implicit biases.
- Hold yourself accountable for the negative influence that implicit biases have on your perceptions, judgments, behavior, decisions, and actions.

Scan this QR code with your smartphone camera to test your biases



# Speak Out When You See Ableism

When you witness ableism, if you feel it is safe to do so, speak up about it.

- Help other to understand what it is and let people know that ableism isn't okay.
- Pay attention when ableism appears in the media, even in the form of comedy. It's one thing for a person with a disability to make light of their own disability, but it is offensive when a nondisabled person is making someone's disability the punchline.
- Notice what parts of your everyday surroundings might not be accessible or accommodating to others. Is there something you can do about that?



# Work Collaboratively With People With Disabilities

Program access includes all policies, practices and procedures that permit people with disabilities to participate in programs and to access important information. This goes beyond architectural access to include effective communication and reasonable modification.

When you involve people with disabilities on councils, Board of Directors, or committees make sure they have all the information beforehand so they can fully participate.

- People with disabilities learn and receive information in different ways. If you want to hear the voices of people with disabilities, you must consider that it may take more time. This is part of people being an ally and showing respect for individuals differences.
- When collaborating with people with disabilities do not speak over them, change their wording, or repeat what they are saying. If you need clarification, ask them for it instead of guessing or assuming.
- If a person is using a communication device, give them time to say everything they are needing to say. Practice the pause. Do not read ahead and try to guess what they are saying.
- People with disabilities should be and not are more and more leading the way.

Allies should support the movement and collaborate with them to build even more support.

# Support the Movement

This booklet was written to give an understanding of how to be an effective ally of a marginalized group. In the case of this booklet, that group is people with disabilities, but it is important to note that there are people with disabilities who also represent other marginalized groups. Much of what is covered in this booklet helps to understand why allies are important, the concepts of equality and power and control, how our language effects perceptions, and how to amplify the voices of activists through understanding.

By examining privilege, in this case nondisabled privilege, we can notice and work to alter our own biases and assumptions. This enables us to see bias where it exists and to identify ableism or other forms of oppression. It is through working collaboratively with activists who have disabilities that we can become an effective ally and address social and environmental barriers that exist.

Support the Movement – For more information about how to be an effective ally for marginalized groups, including people with disabilities, visit these resources.

- [Learning to be an ally for people from diverse groups and backgrounds.](https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/be-an-ally/main) <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/be-an-ally/main>
- [What is allyship?](https://www.edi.nih.gov/blog/communities/what-allyship) <https://www.edi.nih.gov/blog/communities/what-allyship>
- <https://www.accessliving.org/newsroom/blog/ableism-101/>

# Support the Movement

**If it were not for the  
self advocacy  
movement,  
I would not be the  
leader...or the  
person...I am  
today.**

**Julie Petty  
Arkansas**



**“Self advocacy is about  
networking... but also to  
help us find  
encouragement and  
power among one  
another.”**

**Michael W. Thornton  
Self Advocacy  
Coordinator  
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