

a handbook on

# doing away with ableism



# what is ableism?

Ableism is a word used to describe any form of discrimination taking place in favour of people who are able-bodied.

This discrimination may manifest as discriminatory talk or acts, and even in the perception of disability in itself. For example, as pointed out in an article in "Feminists with Disabilities," ableism also extends to cover the general belief that disability is equal to a defect that is in need of correction - instead of being treated as a form of diversity.



# how does ableism manifest?

If you look around you, it won't take you long to see how ableist the world is. We don't see accessibility of spaces around us - except for the odd wheelchair ramp.

We listen to people around us using ableist language - words like crazy, insane, retarded, and lame, for instance. Ableism also manifests itself in the form of the assumption that disabilities are always visible.



# how does ableism manifest?

We also see instances of able-bodied people using their privilege - parking in a spot meant for someone with a disability, or using a bathroom stall that is meant for a person with a disability.

Another common manifestation is how able-bodied individuals assume the lack of personal agency / autonomy on part of a person with a disability. We also see instances where able-bodied individuals feel entitled to know how a person became disabled.



# doing away with ableism

The first step in dispensing with ableism in our everyday approach to life and people around us is to internalise the truth that being able-bodied is not a norm that everyone has to conform to.

This means, then, that we must come to understand, internalize and normalize the fact that a disability is not a defect or an anomaly in need of correction, and that we cannot impose our idea of "normal" and "able" upon anyone else against their autonomy.



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The second step is to alter our language. We commonly use words like "lunatic" or "retarded" among other terms to describe people around us. We also call jokes that are not funny, "lame."

The key is to identify what words we use, and to understand what they really mean. Do they poke or jibe a person with a disability? Do they minimize the struggles that the particular disability involves? If they do, stop using those words.



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Another important point to remember is to constantly check your privilege. It is important to strive to break the unconscious and the conscious bias and to arrive at a place of respect in your behaviour and mode of engagement.

Do not use resources that are meant for those who have a disability, and avoid disregarding their personal struggles. Remember, you are not entitled to demand their story, nor disregard disabilities that you can't see at first glance.



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We are taught to help people around us - and one of the earliest examples we are taught is helping a blind person cross a street. While in principle the idea of being compassionate and helpful is great, it is important to understand that having a disability does not mean the person lacks autonomy or personal agency.

If you want to let anyone know that you are there to help, say so. But do not decide for yourself that you can and should help them, and impose yourself on another.



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Finally, be inclusive in every sense of the term. A person's narrative and choices in negotiating their disability is entirely their journey to make, and they have full freedom to determine what that journey is going to look like.

Avoid imposing an idea of what they should be doing instead, on them.



# references

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