Disabilities, Diversity & Inclusion

# Module 2: Why does it matter?

Note: This text script is intended for use as an accessibility tool for use with the video for module 2, “why does it matter?” To access the video, visit <https://bit.ly/33XiOap>. This script and related video content are copyright 2021, Karla Fitch. Please do not copy this content without express written consent from the author.

## SLIDE 1

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A title slide

**SLIDE TEXT:** Disabilities, Diversity & Inclusion, part 1: Introduction to ableism. Created by Karla Fitch, MTSC; Connecting for Kids (she/her/hers). MSW student – Cleveland State University.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Welcome to part two of disabilities, diversity and inclusion – the impacts of ableism. This is the second part of a four-part program designed to introduce parents, caregivers, providers, and people with disabilities to the concept of ableism. After completing the program, you will not only be able to recognize ableism, you will also be able to apply what you have learned to dismantle it.

## SLIDE 2

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** Icons depicting a caution symbol and a group of people appear under the title, “content notes.”

**SLIDE TEXT:** Ableism/Offensive Language: This presentation Includes historical information and ableist language that may be upsetting to some. This information is included for the purposes of educating others on the harm caused by ableism.

Person-First Vs Identity-First Language:

This presentation uses both person-first and identity-first language interchangeably since either may be used depending on individual preference. When interacting with people with disabilities, it is important to consider individual preference.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Before we begin, I would like to review these two content notes.

First, this program contains references to ableism and some offensive language. This information is included for the purposes of educating others on the harm caused by ableism.

Second, this presentation uses both person-first and identity-first language interchangeably since either may be used depending on individual preference. When interacting with people with disabilities, it is important to consider individual preference.

## SLIDE 3

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A photo of school-aged, Black American boy who uses a wheelchair is shown. The boy is writing at a desk in a classroom.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Over the course of this program, we will explore how ableism took hold in our society, how ableism hurts different people and groups, and what ableism can look like for those who experience it. We will end with a reflection on how individuals and groups can work to dismantle ableism.

We’ll use four questions to guide us:

* Part 1: What is ableism?
* Part 2: Why does it matter?
* Part 3: What does ableism look like?
* Part 4: What can we do about it?

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** As you may recall from part one, we’ll use four questions to guide us on our study of ableism, including:

* What is ableism?
* Why does it matter?
* What does ableism look like?
* What can we do about it?

Part one looked at the question, “what is ableism?” by offering you some definitions, a framework for how ableism appears in our thoughts and our actions, and some history and models that are commonly used to explain ableist behavior.

In part two, we’ll explore the different groups impacted by ableism and illustrate how ableism impacts not only people with disabilities but also our communities at large.

## SLIDE 4

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A male hand is positioned on a wheelchair rail to propel the wheelchair forward.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Part 2: Why does it matter?

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Let’s get started.

## SLIDE 5

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A quote by Lila Watson

**SLIDE TEXT:** “If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” – Lila Watson

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** I’d like to start by sharing a quote from Lila Watson, a [Murri](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murri_(people)) visual artist, activist and academic working in the field of Women's issues and Aboriginal [epistemology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epistemology). She said:

**“If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”**

-- “because your liberation is bound up with mine.” Let’s unpack that here and see what it means.

Watson is speaking from her intersectional position as both an indigenous person and as a woman. When she suggests that your liberation is “bound up in hers,” she is inviting you to acknowledge – even from positions of relative privilege and power – that we are all impacted by oppression.

## SLIDE 6

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** Three concentric circles focus on the central icon of a person with a wheelchair that is universally used to designate disability accessibility. Lines are drawn to each of the circles, moving outward from smallest to largest, that include the text, disabled person, family and friends, and community.

**SLIDE TEXT:** A systems approach

**SLIDE SCRIPT**: The systems approach is commonly used in social work to understand how the experiences of an individual are interconnected with others, with society, and with the environment.

If we look at the disabled person as the center of the system, we can imagine the impacts of ableism rippling outward through the social systems of family, friends, employer, church or temple, community, and beyond -- a lot like when you toss a rock into a still pond.

The person with a disability may be the target of the prejudice or oppression, but the impact of the attitude or action is much broader.

## SLIDE 7

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** The two sides of the slide share points about overt ableism and covert ableism.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Overt ableism: usually intentional, more easily recognized. Covert ableism: more subtle, may not be recognized as ableism.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** We begin with people with disabilities because this group is essentially “ground zero” for ableism. When we look at ableism, it impacts people with disabilities in two ways:

Overt ableism tends to be intentional and easily recognized. Examples include exclusion, using disability as a punchline, and violence. In most cases of overt ableism, there is an awareness that the act is hurtful. Yet as we learned in part one, the act is seen as justified by the perpetrator because it helps that person or group maintain power and privilege.

Covert ableism is much more subtle and my not even be recognized as such by the person engaging in it. Covert ableism can show up in our language (for example, referring to something you don’t like as “lame”). It can also show up as failing to think about access (for example, choosing a movie for your friends’ movie night that doesn’t offer closed captioning.)

Acts of covert ableism are often called “micro-aggressions” because when you experience just one of them, it can feel more like an annoyance.

Over time and with repeated exposure, a person who experiences micro-aggressions can internalize them, resulting in a state of what is called “internalized ableism.”

## SLIDE 8

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** On the right side of this slide, a photo depicts a male wheelchair user leaving a store. He has a brown paper bag in his lap and is pushing the door open with his free hand.

**SLIDE TEXT:** When a person experiences internalized ableism, they may begin to project negative feelings onto themselves.

This can result in lost opportunities, poor self esteem, and a lower sense of self efficacy.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** A person with a disability who begins to experience internalized ableism may project negative feelings onto themselves.

Let’s consider a fictional case example.

An adult wheelchair user named Ben has exceptional knowledge about nature and the local environment. A staff position is available at a nearby nature center, but Ben accepts a job welcoming guests at a big box store without even investigating the nature center job. When asked why he didn’t follow his dream of working at the nature center, Ben explains that he always had trouble navigating pathways with his wheelchair and he was worried that he would be a burden on the nature center staff.

In this case, Ben has internalized the lack of access he experienced with the nature center trails to mean that his potential contributions are worth less to the nature center than a nondisabled person.

Here’s another example.

Linda was diagnosed with Postural tachycardia syndrome (PoTS), which is a condition where abnormal heart rate can cause dizziness and fainting. After a fainting experience in the grocery story parking lot, Linda’s doctor recommended an accessible parking placard for her car. A week later, when Linda returns to the grocery store, she parks in the reserved accessible parking spot. As she gets out of her car, a woman yells that she “looks just fine” and that she “should be ashamed for being too lazy to walk into the store.” Linda is so horrified by the incident that she gets back into the car and leaves without doing her shopping. From then on, she refuses to use the placard – even though some days the act of walking into the store from the parking lot exhausts her for the rest of the day.

Linda’s experience with internalized ableism has left her to believe that she doesn’t deserve accommodations that would give her the capability to do more with what she has.

## SLIDE 9

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** The two sides of the slide identify differences between empowering and avoiding responses that families may have to ableism.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Family members can react to ableism in two different ways: Empowering: educating, informing. Avoiding: ignoring, hiding.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** In their study of family responses to ableism, Neely-Barnes et al. identified four response types commonly used by families. Empowering response types, which included educating and informing, helped families to advocate for social change. According to the researchers, families who chose to educate others on their child’s disability or who were willing to inform others about their child’s needs experienced higher levels of empowerment. These families also acted in ways that ended up creating more inclusive environments for their children.

Neely-Barnes et al. also found that that families would sometimes choose to ignore ableism or hide their child’s diagnosis from others. These actions were often used when the family decided that it would be ineffective to advocate for change.

For example, one of the focus groups interviewed, parents of children who had Sickle Cell Disease, shared that they sometimes choose to hide their child’s diagnosis during job interviews. Their rationale was that they would not be hired if their employers knew about the diagnosis because it often requires them to miss work while caring for their child.

Neely-Barns et al. suggest that hiding a diagnosis or ignoring someone who has committed an ableist act is an example of internalized ableism. In other words, the parents in the study were keeping manifestations of their child’s disability hidden as much as possible to keep other people in the community happy.

## SLIDE 10

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A Black American, school-aged boy stares off to the right. He is seated on the floor and has a notepad and pencil in his hands.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Case example: LaShawn and Jason.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Let’s look at another case example that happens with families.

LaShawn and her 7-year-old son, Jason, are at the store. As LaShawn places her items on the belt at the checkout, Jason spies his favorite fruit snacks in the cart of the shopper behind them. He instantly grabs the fruit snacks from the other shopper’s cart and pushes the box into his mom’s arm, upending a gallon of milk she was putting on the belt. There’s a huge mess and the clerk sighs loudly while alerting maintenance.

As they wait for someone to bring a mop, the shopper behind them scolds LaShawn for being a bad parent. LaShawn is embarrassed but doesn’t tell the clerk or the other shopper that Jason is autistic.

LaShawn is experiencing covert ableism as part of a family unit that includes her disabled son because the clerk and the shopper assumed that Jason was a typical child with poor behavior. The fact that LaShawn chose to hide Jason’s diagnosis would indicate that she did not feel empowered to do anything to help at that moment.

What’s even more challenging in this case example is LaShawn and Jason’s intersectionality with race. At age 7, Jason may be perceived as an unruly child, but as he becomes an adult, outsiders are statistically more likely to jump to conclusions about his behavior.

According to a white paper produced by the Ruderman Family Foundation, 1/3 to ½ of all use-of-force incidents involving police involve a disabled civilian. The white paper also elaborates that “disability intersects with other factors such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, to magnify degrees of marginalization and increase the risk of violence.” In effect, Jason and his family must find ways to cope with a double-dose of marginalization that comes from both Jason’s disability and their family’s identity as a racial minority.

## SLIDE 11

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A university lecture hall is shown on the right side of the slide. The lecture hall is set up in an auditorium style with students seated at desks at different levels. A female wheelchair user sits at the very back of the lecture hall, next to the door. She is also listening to the lecture but is unable to go to a desk because of the steps.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Community systems, including schools, churches, recreational facilities, and other venues often exclude people with disabilities.

SLIDE SCRIPT: In the previous two examples, we looked at ableism from the perspective of people who either directly or indirectly experienced prejudice; however, ableism frequently impacts the community at large in indirect ways. In the first example, a knowledgeable candidate never even considered a job where he may have been a great asset due to ableism. In the second example, a mother felt disempowered to make a more inclusive environment for her child.

We see similar experiences in schools, churches, and other community organizations as demonstrated by this, now-viral photo, Tweeted by Sarah-Marie Da Silva (2020), a zoology student at The University of Hull in the United Kingdom.

Students in this lecture may have been able to benefit from dialog with Da Silva, but her position in the classroom makes that sort of engagement difficult, if not completely impossible.

## SLIDE 12

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** Three icons highlight the losses a community suffers when ableism is present.

**SLIDE TEXT:** What we lose… workforce talent, diverse communities, exchange of ideas.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** When people with disabilities and their families experience ableism, the entire community loses. Ben may have been the best employee the nature center ever had. LaShawn and her son could have been part of a neighborhood that benefits from all kinds of diversity. Sarah-Marie Da Silva could have contributed to the shared learning in her zoology class. These are things we’ll never know because of the way ableism impacts us.

## SLIDE 13

**SLIDE DECRIPTION:** A quote from Henry Ford.

**SLIDE TEXT:** “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.” – Henry Ford

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** I’d like to close this part of the program with a quote from Henry Ford. Ford was no saint, but he saw the value of employing people with disabilities. According to an article by Allen Rutger, Ford employed almost 10,000 people with disabilities in different jobs throughout the manufacturing process.

The quote reads, “**Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success**.” Ableism prevents us from coming together. As long as ableism exists, we will never make it to success.

## SLIDE 14

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A female wheelchair user is depicted from behind. A backpack is slung on the back of her wheelchair and she is moving toward city buildings on a cobblestone street. Other people walk or stop for conversation nearby.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Thank you.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Thank you for joining me. This concludes part two of this program. In part three, we’ll look at examples of ableism looks like. We’ll then move on to part four to share some tools to help you to dismantle ableism.

## SLIDE 15

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** Acknowledgements slide which credits program supporters.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Charisse N. Montgomery, M.A., M.Ed., GPAC. Charisse (“Nikki”) provided valuable insight into the experiences of Black Americans with disabilities.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Before we go, I’d once again like to thank some of the talented individuals who have helped to make this program a reality.

Thank you to Charise Montgomery for your valuable insights into the experiences of Black Americans with disabilities. Sarah Rintamaki has helped to support this project from the beginning with overwhelming encouragement and with her insights into the experiences of families with disabled minor children. Finally, Lisa Ruman contributed to this project through an extension of her supervision work and by helping me to include systems and empowerment approaches consistent with social work values.

I am deeply grateful to each of you for your support.

## SLIDE 16 (References)

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