Disabilities, Diversity & Inclusion

# Module 4: What can I do about ableism?

Note: This text script is intended for use as an accessibility tool for use with the video for module 4, “what can I do about ableism?” 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 4: What can I do about ableism? Created by Karla Fitch, MTSC; Connecting for Kids (she/her/hers). MSW student – Cleveland State University.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Welcome to part four of disabilities, diversity and inclusion – what can I do about ableism? This is the final 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 explored the different groups impacted by ableism and saw how ableism impacts not only people with disabilities but also our communities at large. We also looked at a few case examples where individuals and families experienced ableism. Part three took a deeper dive into what ableism looks like.

In part four, we’ll identify three steps that can help us to dismantle ableism.

## SLIDE 4

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A photo of a Black American woman moving down a community sidewalk with her wheelchair. She is smiling.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Part 4: What can I do about ableism?

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Let’s get started.

## SLIDE 5

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A girl with Down syndrome is depicted with filtered light that gives the effect of sparkling raindrops on the camera lens. The left side of the slide identifies three steps to dismantling ableism.

**SLIDE TEXT:** The three steps: become aware, reflect, listen.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** If this program has convinced you that it’s time to do something about ableism, I’m glad you stuck around. This final section is designed to empower you to take the next steps. Before we get started, it’s important to keep in mind that this is a process. In Section 1, we talked about how ableism is an ideological belief. Ideological beliefs take time to become part of our culture and they also take time to dismantle.

There will be “mess-ups” and times that we say or do something that comes from the bias of ableism. The best thing we can do when this happens is to stop, acknowledge the mistake/apologize, and move forward with the learning process.

The action steps in this section are based on the National Association for Social Work’s (NASW) Anti-Oppression Informed Practice (AIOP) competency, which charges individuals to situate in an understanding of history and culture, be critical of systems and power, and prioritize relationships and mutual transformation. By practicing in becoming aware, reflecting on privilege and power, and listening, we can improve upon our own capabilities to dismantle ableism.

## SLIDE 6

**SLIDE DESCIRPTION:** A text-based slide that explores questions that can help promote awareness of personal feelings on disability.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Step 1: Be aware. This slide also includes the list of questions identified in the slide script.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Much of this program has been shaped to give you a head start in this first step. We discussed the historical and social contexts of ableism and models of disability. We also looked at how ableism not only impacts people with disabilities but also our communities at large and some of the ways ableism manifests in both actions and in words. But we’ve only explored generalizations -- to get through step 1, we must challenge ourselves to do more.

Begin by looking at your own experiences. By exploring your own experiences with disability, you can position yourself to begin learning about others as well. Consider questions such as:

* How did you understand disability when you were growing up?
* What expectations did you have about disability and where do you think they came from?
* What emotions do you have when you think about the word, “disability?”
* Do you have any friends or family members who are disabled? What is your relationship with them like?
* If you have a friend or family member with a disability, what surprised you about that person? Why do you think it was surprising?

If you have the opportunity to take the disability IAT (implicit.harvard.edu/implicit), this can also provide valuable insight into your exploration.

## SLIDE 7

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A quote by Robin DiAngelo.

**SLIDE TEXT:** The quote is included in the slide script.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** As you explore, it’s possible that you’ll discover some things that you don’t like about yourself. Give yourself space to sit with any guilt and unpack those feelings. You can also talk to someone you trust, like a counselor or clergy person.

It’s important to remember that our modern society did not create ableism -- we inherited it. In her 2019 presentation with the YWCA of Greater Cleveland, Robin DiAngelo spoke of past oppressions against Black Americans, saying:

**“I do not feel guilty about that because I know that I did not choose to be socialized in this way. But I am responsible for changing the way we go forward.”**

This wisdom applies equally to guilt that we feel over how our culture has treated people with disabilities. Choosing to prioritize responsibility over guilt can be empowering and give you the momentum to keep doing this work.

## SLIDE 8

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A cartoon on the right side of the screen shows a group of students on a sidewalk, leading up a hill. The group is followed, at some distance, by a teacher who is pushing a boy in a wheelchair. Above the group of students, a bubble appears with the question, “why is George always behind us whenever we go places?” The caption reads, “second grade students ponder one of the great mysteries of Hillview school.” The left side of the slide poses some questions about the scenario.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Step 2: Reflect. Why do the students always travel on foot? What other options do the students have to go on field trips? Who benefits from this arrangement? Who loses?

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Our brief look at history in Section 1 demonstrated that people with disabilities have been consistently marginalized in American society. Policies, practices, and laws that prioritize nondisabled people’s access to resources and power are common.

In another cartoon example by Michael Giangreco and Kevin Ruelle (1998), students are shown asking why George, a classmate who uses a wheelchair, is always behind the group when they go places.

What the students have failed to consider is that the location of their school, aptly named “Hillview,” for its position on a hill, privileges them to go ahead of their classmate. George, on the other hand, must wait for assistance from the teacher in order to get the same access as his peers (presumably because he is unable to control his ascent or descent on the hill).

How would George’s experience be different if his school was at the bottom of the hill or if a wheelchair accessible bus was available to transport all of the students at once?

When we ask ***critical questions***, we position ourselves to understand elements of privilege and power. With a better understanding of privilege and power, we are also better positioned to act against them.

## SLIDE 9

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A screen shot from the March 21 Facebook post by Disabiliy Scoop. The post includes a photo of a mother and her disabled teen daughter as they are about to head out the front door of their home. The mother is wiping the daughter’s face and has a frustrated-looking frown. The daughter looks uncomfortable but is allowing her mother to clean her. The post headline reads, “Waiting lists may be eliminated for disability services provided by Medicaid.” The left side of the slide poses some questions about the scenario.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Step 2: Reflect. What does this photo communicate? Who has power in this photo? Who doesn’t? Why?

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Here’s another example to help you reflect on power and privilege. This story, published by Disability Scoop, discusses new legislation targeted at ending waitlists for people with disabilities who need community-based supports. The photo chosen to headline the story shows a mother, wiping her disabled daughter’s face, before they leave their home. While arguable, the mother’s act is one of love, the daughter looks uncomfortable and vulnerable. Let’s reflect on it together.

* If you didn’t see the headline, what would you say that the photo is trying to communicate?
* Who has the power in this photo? Who doesn’t?
* Why do you think the editors chose this photo to tell their story?

## SLIDE 10

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** A text-based slide that explores questions to help facilitate conversation with friends and loved ones with disabilities.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Step 3: Listen. The slide also includes the list of questions identified in the slide script.

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** The final step in empowering ourselves to be anti-ableist is to listen to people with disabilities. When we develop mutually beneficial relationships with people who are different from ourselves, we not only develop empathy and compassion, we can also learn more about what it’s like to experience the world from their point of view.

If you are a parent or caregiver to someone with a disability, start at home with your loved one.

* What does the person love? What’s important to them?
* What frustrates him or her?
* How does your loved one communicate these feelings? Words? Behavior? Both?
* What does the person like most about themselves? Dislike?
* What would they change about you?

## SLIDE 11

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** The right side of the slide includes the cover of Keah Brown’s book, entitled, “The Pretty One.” On the cover image, Keah Brown, a Black American disabled woman, is wearing a gray sweater and black rimmed glasses. She is laughing.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Keah Brown, Author, creator of the #DisabledAndCute hashtag.

* keahbrown.com
* FB: facebook.com/KeahBrown4
* Twitter: @Keah\_Maria
* IG: Instagram.com/keah\_maria

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Listening to the conversations of adults in the disability community can also help empower anti-ableist action. It would be impossible to list all the disabled adults who are working toward a more inclusive future, but I would like to get you started with a few of my favorite voices.

We’ll begin with Keah Brown, an author and the creator of the #DisabledAndCute hashtag. She is passionate about representation and opportunities for people with disabilities. Brown’s story shares how she learned to love herself despite having a body that wasn’t in the same category as our cultural definitions of beauty.

## SLIDE 12

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** Lawrence Carter-Long, a Caucasian main with cerebral palsy, is shown in a photo on the right side of the slide. He is seated on-stage on a stool and is performing a stand-up comedy act.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Lawrence Carter-Long, Director of Communications at Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF), creator of the #SayTheWord hashtag.

* Twitter: @LCarterLong

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** We’ve already mentioned Lawrence Carter-Long when we discussed disability and language in part three of this program. Carter-Long is a life-long disability activist who has worked in a number of areas including representation, disability rights, disability in media.

## SLIDE 13

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** The right side of the slide includes a professional portrait of Rebecca Cokley, A Caucasian little person with red hair and freckles. She is dressed in a blue blazer and is visible from the shoulders up against a brick background.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Rebecca Cokley, Director of the Disability Justice Initiative at the Center for American Progress.

* Twitter: @RebeccaCokley

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Rebecca Cokley is a disability activist and speaker with a long history of disability policy activism. Cokley’s work in policy has helped improve access and inclusion for many Americans with disabilities.

## SLIDE 14

**SLIDE DESRIPTION:** The right side of the slide includes a photo of the cover of Haben Girma’s book, “Haben: The DeafBlind Woman Who Conquered Harvard Law.” On the cover is a photo of Haben Girma, a Black American woman, wearing a blue dress. Girma appears to be looking into the distance to the right.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Haben Girma, Disability rights lawyer, author, public speaker.

* Habengirma.com
* FB: facebook.com/habengirma
* Twitter: @HabenGirma
* IG: Instagram.com/habengirma

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** Haben Girma is a disability rights lawyer, author and public speaker. One of her major areas of activism is in improving access to technology for people with disabilities.

## SLIDE 15

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** Erica Mones, a Caucasian woman in a flowered dress who uses a cane, is shown standing in front of an advertisement for the NEDA blog. A quote from Mones is also included in the advertisement, which reads, “I want recovery spaces, to be more informed on disability and how ableism can affect mental health and body image.” The quote is attributed to Th eIntersection of Disability and Eating Disorder Recovery by Erica Mones.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Erica Mones, Writer, podcaster, and disability activist.

* ericamones.wordpress.com
* Twitter: @ericamones
* IG: Instagram.com/ericamones

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Erica Mones is a freelance writer for PopSugar and staff writer for Cripple Magazine who's particularly interested in disability and mental health. She has a podcast called “No standing Ovations, Please,” where she disuses disability and mental health issues.

## SLIDE 16

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** Vilissa Thompson, a Black American woman who uses a power chair, is pictured against a background with a quote that reads, “As a Black disabled woman, my determination and fearlessness in speaking the truth and improving the status of those like myself are unapologetic.”

**SLIDE TEXT:** Vilissa Thompson, Senior Fellow at Center for American Progress.

* vilissathompson.com
* FB: facebook.com/RampYourVoice
* Twitter: @VilissaThompson
* IG: Instagram.com/vilissathompson

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Vilissa Thompson is a social worker whose activism interests are focused on the experiences of Black women with disabilities. She created the [#DisabilityTooWhite](https://wakelet.com/wake/2b4b1510-c26c-4b87-89cb-1ed1be6150c5) viral hashtag in 2016 that addressed the lack of diversity within the disability community, and how a lack of representation impacts disabled people of color and their ability to feel fully included and accepted within the community.

## SLIDE 17

**SLIDE DESCRIPTION:** Alice Wong, a disabled Asian American woman is shown, wearing a BiPAP device that provides oxygen through a nose mask. She is wearing bright red lipstick and a blue shirt and is seated in a power chair.

**SLIDE TEXT:** Alice Wong, Disability Visibility Project Founder & Director

* disabilityvisibilityproject.com
* Twitter: @SFdirewolf
* IG: Instagram.com/alicatsamurai

**SLIDE SCRIPT:** Alice Wong is a disability activist and the creator of the Disability Visibility Project, which encourages people with disabilities to tell their stories and to be part of a global community. The site offers a large collection of interviews where you can listen to even more disabled voices than the ones listed in this program. Wong has also edited two collections of essays from disabled writers.

## SLIDE 18

**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 DESCRIPTION:** So, this is it. We’ve reached the end of one road and positioned ourselves at the beginning of another. You now have the tools to understand how ableism took root in America and see how it impacts not only people with disabilities but also the larger community. You saw some examples of ableism and while the list is far from complete, I hope they help you to be more critical of different interactions and look at how ableism can creep into both our actions and our words. Finally, you explored three steps that can help you to become a better self-advocate or an ally to people with disabilities.

I appreciate your joining me on this journey and hope to meet you again on the path forward.

## SLIDE 19

**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.

Sarah Rintamaki. Sarah contributed to this project with continued support and insight into experiences of families with disabled children.

Lisa Ruman, LISW, CHt. As an independent social worker, Lisa provided supervision and support from a systems perspective.

**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 Charisse 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 20 (References)

Disability Scoop. [disabilityscoop]. (2021, March 22). Work is underway on legislation that could fundamentally transform the nation's system of home- and community-based services, eliminating waiting... [status update]. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/disabilityscoop/posts/10158282048453683

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