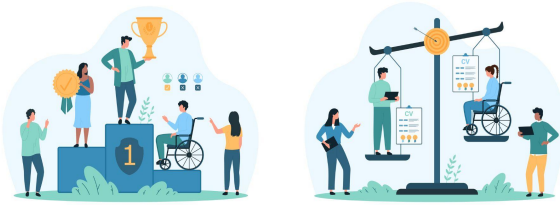


Understanding Ableism and Feeling Good About Yourself

Katherine McLaughlin and Morrigan Hunter



ELEVATUS TRAINING

LEADERS IN SEXUALITY AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY

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Goals:

- ❑ Understand what ableism and internalized ableism mean.
- ❑ Examine how ableism and internalized ableism can impact one's sexuality and relationships.
- ❑ List ways to feel good about your disability and have the relationships you want in your life.

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Agenda for Today

- ❑ Introduction
- ❑ Ableism and History
- ❑ Scenarios
- ❑ Feeling Good About Ourselves
- ❑ Wrap-Up

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Group Agreements

- ❑ Respect differences of opinion
- ❑ Do not yuck my yum
- ❑ Confidential, unless...
- ❑ There is no such thing as a stupid question. Please ask.



Ice-Breaker

When you hear the word ableism,
what is one word you think of?

What is Ableism?

- ❑ Ableism is the idea that people without disabilities are better than people with disabilities.
- ❑ Ableism can look like ignoring what people with disabilities have to say and paying more attention to what people without disabilities have to say.



What is Ableism? Continued



- ❑ Ableism can look like ignoring what people with disabilities need. This might mean not building ramps on buildings or not spending money to hire an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter.
- ❑ Ableism can mean controlling what people with disabilities do. Such as where to live or if they can have relationships.

History of Ableism (1 of 3)

Attitudes:

Drain on society, a burden.

Not smart or need help, cannot work.

Charity: March of Dimes, poor disabled kid.

See as sickly, contagious. "Do not talk to her, you will get what she has."



History of Ableism (2 of 3)

Institutionalization:

Excluded from things,
"Swept under the rug," just
do not want people with
disabilities around. "Ugly
laws," Circus: freak shows



History of Ableism (3 of 3)

Eugenics and Reproduction:

Forced sterilization in this country.



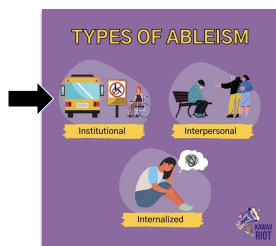
Human and Civil Rights:

Many rights are taken away. For example, work, school, travel, etc.

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What is Ableism? (1 out of 9)

Institutional (Outside of You)



Policies, rules, regulations, and practices within an agency or organization that discriminate against people with disabilities.

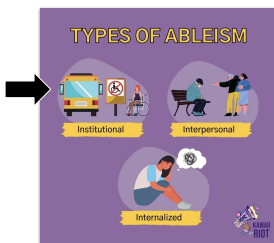
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What is Ableism? (2 out of 9)

Institutional (Outside of You)

General Examples:

- ❑ Buildings with inaccessible spaces.
- ❑ No policy stating the organization will provide sign language interpreters when requested.



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What is Ableism? (3 out of 9)

Institutional (Outside of You)

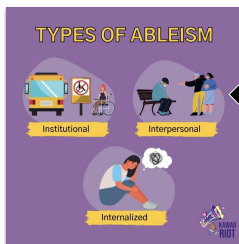
Sexuality examples:

- ❑ Rules for disability benefits that prevent a person from getting married.
- ❑ Laws that say it is okay to force a person with a disability to get sterilized, or take children away.
- ❑ Group home rules that prevent people from having sex.
- ❑ Lack of laws to make sure that people with disabilities get to learn about sexuality.



What is Ableism? (4 out of 9)

Interpersonal (Outside of You)



Thoughts or beliefs that influence social interactions that discriminate

What is Ableism? (5 out of 9)

Interpersonal (Outside of You)

General Examples:

- ❑ Call them names. Using baby talk.
- ❑ Always helping them because they think the person is needy or weak.
- ❑ Family members' homes are not accessible and do not consider your access needs.



What is Ableism? (6 out of 9)

Interpersonal (Outside of You)

Sexuality Examples:

- ☐ Assuming a person with a disability is not interested in sex.
- ☐ Making a big deal out of someone asking a person with a disability to prom.
- ☐ Not wanting to date a person with a disability.
- ☐ Assuming the person is cisgender and straight.

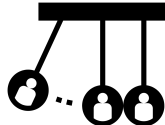


Sexuality and Relationships

How does **ableism (outside of you)** impact your sexuality and relationships?

Example of Impacts

- ☐ Supporters do not help us form relationships or use overprotection versus education. Removed from sexuality classes.
- ☐ People do not see people with disabilities as good partners or attractive.
- ☐ Given messages: Your needs are not valid, not attractive. Might internalize these messages.



What is Ableism? (7 out of 9)

Internalized (Inside of You)



Believing the thoughts
and beliefs of ableism
about yourself.

What is Ableism? (8 out of 9)

Internalized (Inside of You)

General Examples:

- ☐ Thinking you are not smart.
- ☐ Feel you are a burden and should not ask for access to needs.
- ☐ Have low self-esteem.
- ☐ Feel like no one wants you around.



What is Ableism? (9 out of 9)

Internalized (Inside of You)

Sexuality Examples:

- ☐ Believing you cannot have relationships.
- ☐ Thinking you deserve to be treated poorly.
- ☐ Feeling like you cannot have standards in a relationship.
- ☐ Feeling ashamed of sexual desire and feeling like you do not deserve pleasure.



Results of Internalized Ableism on One's Sexuality (1 of 3)

- ❑ **Blaming yourself** when other people treat you poorly. "It is my fault. I deserve to be treated poorly."
- ❑ **They might stay in bad relationships** or settle for less, thinking they cannot do better. "It is better than being alone."
- ❑ **Being used to doing what other people want**, even if it feels wrong. Saying "yes," even when you do not want to.

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Results of Internalized Ableism on One's Sexuality (2 of 3)

- ❑ **Difficulty telling people what your access needs are.** "I could never tell them what I want sexually."
- ❑ **Difficulty healing from abuse and trauma.** "I will always be damaged goods and can never heal." "I feel sad and worthless."
- ❑ **They might think they do not deserve love, are not attractive or desirable, or cannot be a good partner.** "No one will ever love me."

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Results of Internalized Ableism on One's Sexuality (3 of 3)

- ❑ **Thinking that people without disabilities are better than you.** They might only date others with disabilities, even if it is not what they truly want. "I can only be with a person with a disability." "I am only dating you because I cannot date someone without a disability." This might mean hurting other people with disabilities by thinking they are not as good as people without disabilities.

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Steps To Feeling Good

- 1 Recognize ableism and internalized ableism.
- 2 Unlearn negative messages, and replace them with positive self-talk messages.
- 3 Get support from other self-advocates.

Activity Two: Scenarios #1

A person with a disability asks for an interpreter to access a sexuality education class. The class organizers say, "No, we cannot provide that," even though they have the funds to do so.

- ☐ What is ableist about this scenario?
- ☐ What might this person with a disability believe about themselves?

Scenario #1



What would you tell a friend who had this experience?

Activity Two: Scenarios #2

A person of color with a disability is learning about relationships, but is removed from class when the condom demonstration is done because “we don’t want to give them ideas.”

- ☐ What is ableist about this scenario?
- ☐ What might this person with a disability believe about themselves?

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Scenario #2



What would you tell a friend who had this experience?

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Activity Two: Scenarios #3

A person with a disability asks someone out on a date, and the person says, “I might go out with you, but can you even have sex?”

- ☐ What is ableist about this scenario?
- ☐ What might this person with a disability believe about themselves?

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Scenario #3



What would you tell a friend
who had this experience?

Activity Two: Scenarios #4

A person's partner says to them, "You are lucky I put up with you. Most people would not want to date man with a disability who can't work."

- ☐ What is ableist about this scenario?
- ☐ What might this person with a disability believe about themselves?

Scenario #4



What would you tell a friend
who had this experience?

Activity Two: Scenarios #5

The family of a person with a disability always changes the topic when the person with a disability says that he is gay and wants to know how to have safer sex with another man. The person's family says that if they talk about this, it will give him ideas and might cause them to have sex.

Activity Two: Scenarios #5 Continued

- ☐ What is ableist about this scenario?
- ☐ What might this person with a disability believe about themselves?

Scenario Five



What would you tell a friend who had this experience?

Power

Our society gives certain people power.

Power means we listen to them more, treat them with respect, focus on their needs, and give them more choices which can make their life easier.

People who are not disabled tend to have more power than those who are disabled.

Ableism is a form of having less power and being treated unfairly because of your disability.

Everyone should have equal power, but there are certain groups of people who have more power than others.

Who has Power?

The people who tend to have social power are:

- ✓ People with white skin color.
- ✓ Thin and Beautiful, look like celebrities (famous people).
- ✓ Heterosexual or straight: man loves woman, woman loves man.
- ✓ Rich have lots of money.
- ✓ Cisgender, their gender identity matches their gender given to them when they were born.
- ✓ Adult, but not old with gray hair.
- ✓ Christian, Celebrate Christmas, Easter.
- ✓ Man, not a woman or non-binary.
- ✓ Non-disabled, (or hidden disability) do not have a disability, physical or intellectual.



We Are All Equal

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Handout #4

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Steps To Feeling Good Review

1

Recognize ableism and internalized ableism.

2

Unlearn negative messages and replace them with positive self-talk messages.

3

Get support from other self-advocates.

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Unlearning Negative Messages

Give yourself positive self-talk:

☐ I deserve it as much as anyone else.

☐ My type of communication is normal.

☐ I have the right to speak up. If I have pleasure needs, sensory needs, or other needs.

☐ I deserve pleasure.

☐ I am desirable and attractive.

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Unlearning Negative Messages Continued



- ☐ I am not a burden.
- ☐ I deserve these things even if others do not let me or support me.
- ☐ The traumatic experience I had was not my fault.
- ☐ I can heal and have positive relationships.

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Words from Self-Advocates

What would you say to someone with a disability about how to push back on internalized ableism?

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Resources

- ☐ Mia Mingus, "Forced Intimacy an Ableist Norm"
- ☐ Alice Wong, "Disability, Pleasure, and Aging: The Pleasure Principle"
- ☐ Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, "The Joyful Intersections of Disability Justice, Care, and Pleasure"

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Wrap-Up



What is one thing you are planning to do to reduce your chances of being an ableist to yourself?

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Offering evidence and trauma informed curriculum, with on/offline training to help professionals, educators, self-advocates and parents skillfully and confidently navigate the topic of sexuality and healthy relationships.

Curriculum & Related Products

Sexuality Education for People with Developmental Disabilities



Related Products:
Curriculum Slide Deck
Communication Supports

Building Healthy Relationships at Work



Related Products:
Curriculum Slide Deck

Live, Professional Developmental Trainings

3-Day Certificate Training: Becoming a Sexuality Educator and Trainer
CE Contact hrs available for Social Workers

90 Minute Workshop Series
Exploring a wide range of topics related to sexuality and IDD

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Can be customized for your agency or school

3-Year Statewide Training Project
For Teams of Self-Advocates and Professionals to Become Sexuality Educators and Lead Classes for People with IDD

Self-Study Online Courses


Developmental Disabilities & Sexuality 101
For staff at your agency or school

Talking with Your Kids: Developmental Disabilities and Sexuality.
To help parents bridge the gap

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Upcoming Trainings (1 of 2)



Romantic Relationships for Augmented and Alternative Communications (AAC) Users

A workshop for professionals, self-advocates, and organizations who support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Coming Up This Month! Romantic Relationships for Augmented and Alternative Communications (AAC) Users

June 17, 2025 from 3-4:30 pm (EDT)

Learn more and register here:

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1284339476949?aff=odd_tdtcreator



Developing a Sexuality Policy that Empowers, Supports, and Protects

A workshop for professionals, self-advocates, and organizations who support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Developing a Sexuality Policy that Empowers, Supports, and Protects - A Two-Part Workshop

Part 1: October 27th, 2025 from 3-4:30 pm (EDT)

Part 2: December 8th, 2025 from 3-4:30 pm (EDT)

Learn more and register here:

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1226624419659?aff=odd_tdtcreator

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Upcoming Trainings (2 of 2)



ELEVATUS TRAINING

Break Down the Walls: Support Healthy Sexuality for LGBTQ+ People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

A training for professionals, self-advocates, family members, and sexuality educators who work with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Breaking Down the Walls: Support Healthy Sexuality for LGBTQ+ People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

November 4-5, 2025 from 11:00 am - 2:00 pm (EST)

Learn more and register here:

https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1083164366779?aff=odd_tdtcreator

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