

Everyday ableism

Ableism is discrimination in favour of non-disabled people. It is based on an assumption that the physical, cognitive and sensory differences with which disabled people live with are deficits, and it is rooted in the medical model of disability that assumes that disabled people need to be 'fixed'. It is manifest in physical, environmental and attitudinal barriers that exclude and stigmatise an entire group of people as 'less than'.

In society, ableism is manifest in:

- 1. A failure to make the workplace adjustments that people with additional needs require
- 2. A failure to employ and promote disabled people
- 3. The failure to build an inclusive an accessible education system for children
- 4. The segregation of disabled children and adults in special schools and residential care
- 5. The failure to provide choices and opportunities for disabled people to live where they want and with whom they want
- 6. Massive inequalities in access to health care
- 7. The failure to make buildings, events and activities accessible to everyone
- 8. The failure to value disabled people's lives

Some examples of everyday ableism: :

- 1. Asking someone "what's wrong with them"?
- 2. Assuming that a disabled person "suffers from" a particular condition
- 3. Believing that a particular diagnosis tells you everything you need to know about a disabled person
- 4. Reducing someone's life to their difference
- 5. Viewing disabled lives as tragic or inspirational
- 6. Believing that disabilities must be visible
- 7. Failing to anticipate the needs of disabled people and to make the adjustments that they require to participate or access spaces, materials and events

Challenging abelism is about more than language but it is important to think about how language is used to reproduce ableist assumptions. Although often subtle or "unintentional", particular uses of language are harmful and offensive. The following are examples of common ableist micro-aggressions. **Have you heard any? Have you said any?**

`That's so lame'	'You're a bit bi-polar today'
'She is crazy' / 'He's such a psycho'	'He must be off his meds'
'I don't think of you as disabled'	'She is so OCD'

What can we do to challenge ableism?

Do...

- Ask what a disabled person needs to participate in a particular meeting, activity or event
- Try to embed good, inclusive practice in everything you do this will be good for everyone and it will mean that disabled people are not singled out
- Treat disabled people as you would a non-disabled person
- Listen to the voices of disabled people. Disabled people know what helps and what they need
- Disability is intersectional, seek out different views
- Challenge disability discrimination wherever it raises it's head
- Be respectful of individual experiences
- Promote the social model of disability
- Challenge your own assumptions
- Promote disability equality

Don't...

- Challenge a disabled person about their disability when they disclose
- Assume you know what a disabled person needs
- Speak on behalf of someone with a disability unless they ask you to do so
- Don't assume that a disabled person's life is any less diverse, complex, happy or sad than that of a non-disabled person
- Expect a disabled person to teach you everything
- Don't ask intrusive questions

Ablesim leads to discrimination against disabled people. Disabled workers facing disability discrimination should contact their branch rep and/or regional office for further advice and assistance. You can find further support such as your local contacts and regional office here https://www.ucu.org.uk/support.

UCU promotes the social model of disability that focuses on the ways in which society is organised, and the social and institutional barriers which restrict disabled people's opportunities. The social model sees the person first and argues that the barriers they face, in combination with their impairments, are what disables them. You can watch our short film on the social model of disability here https://youtu.be/Do6U1j1vRYU.

#Includeus!

