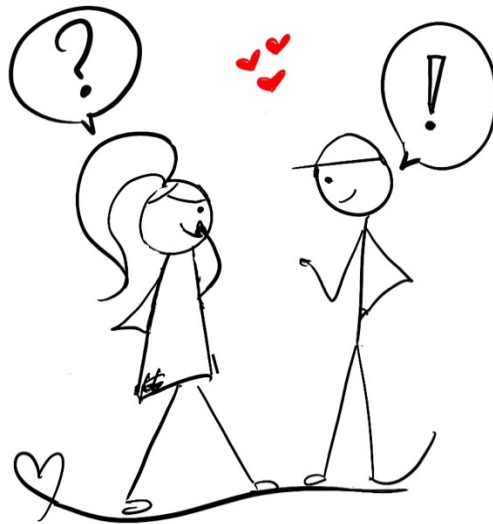


# How To Speak To A Disabled Person With Confidence

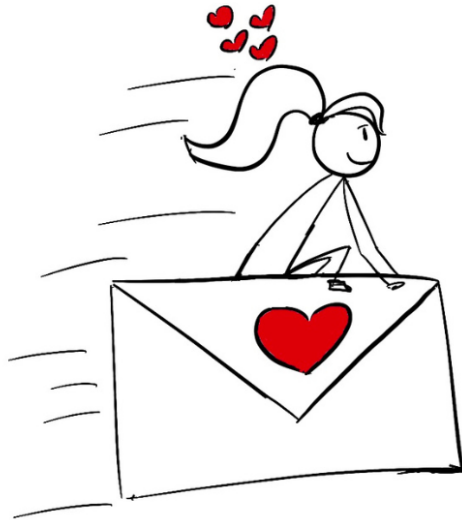


*Figure 1 Two stick figures standing across from each other. Lilly has a question mark above her head, Ollie has an exclamation mark.*

Created by Lia Stoll  
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*Figure 2 Lilly is riding on an envelope with a red heart*

# How to Speak To A Disabled Person With Confidence



*Figure 3 Lilly is running with red hearts over her head*

Would you like to learn how to talk to a disabled person with confidence?

In this complete, step-by-step guide, I'll share tips to help you talk about disability with confidence so you can connect with disabled people.

You'll also learn the secret to unlocking empathy, creating life-changing relationships, and motivating people to see disabled people with an open heart; for who they truly are.

Ready?

Yours highly caffeinated.

Lia xxx

PS: This guidebook is self-published. I write and edit myself so spelling errors might be sprinkled. If you find them (which I secretly hope you don't, teehee) please, be brave and email me at [info@disabilitywriter.com](mailto:info@disabilitywriter.com). Suggestions are welcome too!

# Understand Your Hidden Fear Of Disability



*Figure 4 Lilly's smiling and running with a balloon with Accessible Hashtags*

Ever found yourself talking to a person with a disability only to feel tense and flustered?

We've all been there.

Talking to a disabled person can feel like an unfamiliar and uncomfortable place. This dark place is your self-doubt, your lack of confidence, your fear of being separate from this person and suddenly having to deal with it.

And the result?

Feeling afraid of disability.

Feeling awkward.

Why does this happen?

For one thing, because you don't see the human being in front of you. You focus too hard on the disability. Then, you label disability as different. Less-able. Fragile. Bad.

And, bad is scary.

Well, one thing's for sure: You're not alone.

## Meeting disability for the first time



*Figure 4 Lilly and her stick figure friend are trying to figure out disability-inclusive language*

Did you know 1 out of 3 people thinks having a disability makes you less happy and less productive?

Where does this come from?

Let me tell you a little story.

When Anna was 5 years old, her dad's friend came to ask for a guide dog.

He was a towering man, with a big face, and cloudy eyes. He used a cane when walking, and wore large dark sunglasses. Anna was scared of him.

"Don't stare at him, it's rude! Look away!" her grandmother said.

But, she couldn't help herself. She wanted to stare.

Because when you're a kid, you want to try and understand why someone has a body different from yours.

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So, Anna grew up afraid of disability. She learned disability is something you don't acknowledge, it's something to avoid. And, she realized people think that too.

What might surprise you is that I left out a piece of the story.

It's the part where I was Anna.

Instead of ignoring disability, my father asked me:

'Do you know why Petro's eyes are different? 'Because he has an eye disease that stops him from seeing well. His cane helps him to see when he's moving around and now, he'd like a guide dog to help him zip through the city.'

In short, the more time we spent together the more I learned Petro was a million laughs, not scary.

He taught me all about canes, how a blind person gets around, and even how I can magnify my senses, and see with my ears.

And that's when the most amazing thing in the world happened.

A glorious seed was planted.

A seed that grew to shape my attitude. My actions. And, my perception of disabled people. A seed that took the place of discrimination, and prejudice, and began to close the door to ableism.

And you can plant that seed too.

By now you'll have realized how you see a disabled person springs from your limiting beliefs. A set of beliefs placing a greater value on non-disabled people, and a lower value on disabled people.

So, when you're staring, instead of looking away, ask the person next to you the simple question. You'll be surprised how it will give you permission to engage in conversation and learn that disability is ok.

# Control the power of words and wipe out ableism



*Figure 5 Lilly and her two stick figure friends are holding a heart*

According to the [Urban Institute](#), 4 in 10 adults with disabilities experience unfair treatment in healthcare settings, at work, or when applying for public benefits.

If the sight of a disabled person makes you feel uncomfortable, sit with your feeling.

And like a detective, investigate the root that gives rise to the awkwardness, and leads to ableism.

## What is ableism?

Ableism is when your belief system says your abilities are superior to a disabled person. It's when you think disabled people are less than.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg.

Why?

Because our society wasn't created with disabled people in mind, and the world we live in, is at its core 'ableist.'

In fact, ableism has been lurking in our belief system for an outrageously long time. It's the disfigured face of discrimination, the brutal side of social and financial injustice, and the primitive stage of inclusion.

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And, the rotten roots of ableism run deep.

They feed off downgrading limiting beliefs.

They invade malnourished parts of our society and twine their way into daily life taking many forms.

How?

Here are a few ways:

Lack of compliance with disability rights laws

Buildings without braille on signs, elevator buttons, etc.
Buildings without accessible entrances, rooms, etc.
Supermarkets without braille on aisles, or inaccessible entrances
Inaccessible websites
Refusing to provide reasonable accommodations
Refusing to provide access to public transportation
Punch-line disability or mocking disabled people
The belief disabled people need to be healed
Dividing disabled students into separate schools
Using restraint and seclusion to control disabled children
Exposing disability as inspirational or tragic in news stories, movies, and other popular forms of media
Making a movie that doesn't have an audio description or closed captioning
Casting a non-disabled actor to play a disabled character



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### Disrespectful ableist actions

Talking to a disabled person like they are a child, or not talking directly to them, or speaking for them
Thinking people must have a visible disability to be disabled
Questioning if a person is disabled, or 'how much they are disabled
Using a mobility device to lean or rest
Choosing an inaccessible place to meet
Wearing scented products in a scent-free environment
Using the accessible bathroom when you don't need to
Making a movie that doesn't have an audio description or closed captioning
Casting a non-disabled actor to play a disabled character
Asking invasive questions about medical history or personal life without permission

### Obnoxious little-known ableist insults

I don't even think of you as disabled.
Can I pray for you?
I'm super OCD about how I clean my house.
That's lame.
"You are so retarded.
Wow! That guy is crazy.
You're acting so bipolar today.
It's like the blind leading the blind here.
Her ideas fell on deaf ears.
He's such a psycho.

# Disability Inclusive Language



*Figure 5 Lilly is blowing hearts*

I know you don't mean to be insulting.

And, you probably have good intentions.

But even your well-meant comments and actions can have a negative effect on a person with a disability.

The simple truth is when you speak like this you're saying a disabled person is less than. You're communicating disability is bad, and negative, and it's a problem in need of a fix.

So, how can you communicate in a well-respected way?

Let me show you.

Person-first language (PLF)	Identity-first language (IFL)
Example: He is a person who is blind.	Example: She is a blind woman.

**Reminder:** Ask the person what terms they prefer based on their own lived experiences and identity.

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What to say	What not to say
disability/disabled	special needs (unless preferred)
person with a disability  disabled person	differently abled (unless preferred)
person who is able to/unable to  person with high support needs	handicap/handicapped/ suffers from/victim of
neurodivergent  person with Autism/Autistic person  person with a cognitive disability/cognitively disabled person	high functioning/low functioning  mentally challenged/handicapped  mentally retarded
person with an intellectual disability  intellectually disabled person  person with a learning disability	slow  special-ed  normal

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What to say	What not to say
<p>person who uses a wheelchair</p> <p>wheelchair user</p>	<p>wheelchair-bound/confined to a wheelchair/restricted to a wheelchair</p>
<p>person with a mobility disability</p> <p>person using a mobility device</p>	<p>differently abled (unless preferred)</p>
<p>person with a physical disability/physically disabled person</p>	<p>cripple/gimp/invalid/spaz</p> <p>handicap/handicapped</p>
<p>little person</p> <p>person of short stature</p> <p>person with dwarfism/dwarf</p>	<p>midget/stunted</p>
<p>person with a mental health disability</p> <p>person with mental illness</p> <p>person with a psychiatric disability</p> <p>psychiatrically disabled person</p>	<p>psychotic/crazy/disturbed</p> <p>insane /lunatic/mad</p>

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<b>What to say</b>	<b>What not to say</b>
blind person  person who is blind  person with a visual disability/low vision/visual impairment  deafblind person	the blind  partially-sighted
deaf person  person who is deaf  person with a hearing disability  person with hearing loss  hard-of-hearing person	the deaf  hearing impaired  deaf and dumb  deaf and mute
person with Down syndrome  person with trisomy 21	mongoloid/special/Down
person who uses a communication device	non-verbal/can't talk

# Use Compassionate Disability-Inclusive Language



*Figure 6 Lilly is holding her hands to her cheeks smiling at you with red hearts floating above her head*

Lack of knowledge, understanding, and outdated attitudes are some good reasons why the whole world seems uncertain around people with a disability.

Don't let this be you.

Trust in yourself to build life-changing relationships with disabled people. You are on a mission to attract, energize, and motivate people around you to see disabled people with an open heart; for who they are.

People, like you and me.

Warm wishes.

Lia and Lilly ♥