

DOS AND DON'TS FOR THE DISABILITY ALLY



DO

1

DO LISTEN DEEPLY

- Hear the stories, concerns, and hurts.
- Believe what you hear.
- Acknowledge the pain and injustice.

2

DO ASK QUESTIONS AND LISTEN

- Speak directly to a person with a disability.
- Inquire about
 - ...accommodations needed.
 - ...experiences, choice of language.
- Focus on relationship-building.
- Explore more deeply but only if your conversation partner is comfortable doing so.

3

DO PRESUME COMPETENCE

- Assume a person has a way to accomplish things and will ask if assistance is needed.
- Assume that a person can communicate and understand you.
- Create space for leadership, then step aside.
- Check in to gain guidance on issues to be addressed and involvement needed.

4

DO ANTICIPATE AND NOTICE

- ...barriers and lack of accessibility.
- ...who is and is not present "at the table."
- ...who is and is not in the speaking center.
- ...persons being "othered."



DON'T

1

DON'T:

- ...interrupt, rationalize, or get defensive.
- ...say anything – just listen!
- ...quote scripture or theology.

2

DON'T:

- ...direct your question to a caregiver, companion, or interpreter.
- ...ask for a person's diagnosis or medical information or share that information with a third party – don't "out" anyone!
- ...use ableist language.
- ...focus only on the disability experience.

3

DON'T:

- ...assume you know what someone else needs.
- ...insist on providing help or help when not requested to do so.
- ...alter your speech pattern and language.
- ...ask for feedback and input, then ignore it.
- ...stereotype based on media impressions or people with apparently similar disabilities.

4

DON'T:

- ...assume that anything is truly ADA compliant, or that ADA compliance is sufficient.
- ...assume people with disabilities are not present out of a lack of interest.
- ...allow good intentions to serve as an excuse.

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5

DO PLAN AHEAD AND COMMUNICATE

- Involve people with disabilities from the outset before decisions have been made.
- Budget for and routinely provide needed accommodations.
- Provide accessibility information on-line.
- Provide material ahead of time in the requested accessible format.
- Consider transportation needs.
- Consider accessibility in all aspects of the event

6

DO SPEAK OUT, ACCEPT CONSEQUENCES

- Say or do something
 - ...when you spot, read, or hear ableism.
 - ...when concerns of a person with a disability are dismissed or ignored.
 - ...when safety is compromised.

7

DO ADVOCATE

- Challenge unjust policies and laws.
- Ask for feedback and follow the lead of persons with disabilities.
- Pick your battles but keep the goal of an inclusive society in mind.



DON'T

5

DON'T:

- ...plan an event without ensuring full accessibility.
- ...make extensive plans without checking them first with people needing accommodations.
- ...make it hard to find needed information.
- ...make a promise and fail to keep it.
- ...operate from the assumption that any needs equate to "special needs."

6

DON'T:

- ...expect gratitude or do it for your ego.
- ...be surprised by resistance or hostility.
- ...back down when you ruffle feathers.
- ...let the fear of doing the wrong thing keep you from doing something.

7

DON'T:

- ...assume someone else will do it, or that someone with a disability will want to be the advocate for all disability issues.
- ...jump in without knowing the facts and the history of the situation.

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DO

8

DO EXPLORE CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES

- Practice universal design – plan alternatives so all can participate in a way that works.
- Celebrate the way that diversity expands possibilities.
- Remember that many people with disabilities have a wealth of experience finding creative ways to make things work.

9

DO CHECK YOUR PRIVILEGE

- Reflect on ways the world is easy for you.
- Ask for and accept critical feedback.
- Apologize and move on when you get it wrong.

10

DO KEEP ON LEARNING

- Approach learning with humility.
- Follow blogs of disability activists.
- Explore intersectionality.
- Find other allies and hold each other accountable.
- Teach others what you have learned.



DON'T

8

DON'T:

- ...insist that the outcome and process should stay the same as it has always been.
- ...assume your role is to be the fixer and problem-solver.
- ...get in the way of the Spirit leading us all to a new day and new way of being.

9

DON'T:

- ...deny that ableism and privilege exist.
- ...get defensive or argue if you are called out.
- ...take critique personally.
- ...be hard on yourself if you don't get it right.

10

DON'T:

- ...assume that you have reached the point where you no longer have ingrained ableism.
- ...expect you can be a lone ranger ally.
- ...take yourself too seriously.
- ...underestimate the power of a few people to make a difference!



Learn more about ableism through our [Able Privilege](#) and [Ableist Microaggressions](#) handouts.

Refer to the [Ableism Resource List](#) for references and more information, and to the [Ableism and Disability Glossary](#) for definitions of unfamiliar words.