

The Bill that made this month be spotlighted:

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990)

Signed in 1990, “It prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities, including in employment, transportation, public accommodations, communications, and in relation to access to state and local government services.”

Introduction:

The Americans

with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities. The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability just as other civil rights laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, and religion. The ADA guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to enjoy employment opportunities, purchase goods and services, and participate in state and local government programs.

The ADA protects people with disabilities:

A person with a disability is someone who:

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities,
- has a history or record of such an impairment (such as cancer that is in remission), or
- is perceived by others as having such an impairment (such as a person who has scars from a severe burn).

Information gathered from: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/22/observing-disability-pride-month-july>, <https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/>, <https://www.ssdfacts.com/hidden-disabilities>, <https://www.socialdiversity.org/updates/00n8u4gcgi02vu7x2xgsvsbbvj6y79>

Examples of Disabilities:

There is a wide variety of disabilities, and the ADA regulations do not list all of them. Some disabilities are visible and some are not. Some examples of disabilities include:

- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- HIV
- Autism
- Cerebral palsy
- Deafness or hearing loss
- Blindness or low vision
- Epilepsy
- Mobility disabilities such as those requiring the use of a wheelchair, walker, or cane
- Intellectual disabilities
- Major depressive disorder
- Traumatic brain injury

The ADA covers many other disabilities not listed here.

The ADA Prohibits disability discrimination in many areas of life:

To prevent discrimination against people with disabilities, the ADA sets out requirements that apply to many of the situations you encounter in everyday life. Employers, state and local governments, businesses that are open to the public, commercial facilities, transportation providers, and telecommunication companies all have to follow the requirements of the ADA.

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Designed by Ann Magill and updated in 2021 to ensure accessibility, each color of the Disability Pride Flag represents a different type of disability: physical (red), cognitive and intellectual (yellow), invisible and undiagnosed (white), psychosocial (blue), and sensory (green). The charcoal background symbolizes mourning and rage for the victims of ableist violence and abuse, and the colored bands are placed diagonally to convey persons with disabilities “cutting across” societal barriers.

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Hidden Disabilities

Hidden disabilities are various types of disabilities that are not immediately recognizable by the naked eye. Individuals with hidden disabilities may face unique challenges, like social stigma and a lack of acceptance from people who don't understand their disabilities.

22 Examples of Hidden Disabilities

1. ADD/ADHD
2. Allergies (seasonal, common, and food related)
3. Anxiety
4. Arthritis
5. Asthma
6. Autism Spectrum Disorder
7. Brain Injury
8. Chronic Pain
9. Depression
10. Diabetes
11. Digestive Disorders
12. Epilepsy
13. Fibromyalgia
14. HIV/AIDS
15. Learning Disabilities
16. Lupus
17. Lyme Disease
18. Mental Illnesses
19. Multiple Sclerosis
20. Sensory Processing Disorders
21. Sleep Disorders
22. Spinal Disorders

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While hidden disabilities are no less important than visible disabilities, they can sometimes be difficult for others to acknowledge. While seeing someone in a wheelchair may be a consistent reminder that a person has a disability, the same does not hold true with invisible disabilities.

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Temporary Disabilities

Temporary Disabilities can often be looked at as something that can hinder your day to day work-life balance. In many cases, women who are pregnant have been seen to have a temporary disability and, unfortunately, workplaces are recognizing that more and more.

Read this article that walks through application process of someone who needs temporary disability.

<https://hrdailyadvisor.blr.com/2022/08/23/time-is-on-her-side-temporary-disabilities-under-the-ada/>

10 WAYS YOU CAN BE AN ALLY TO PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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1. Labels & Preferred Language

People are more than just their abilities!

Labelling—or “othering”— is a form of ableism. Othering involves viewing or treating a marginalized person as if they fail to meet the criteria for basic respect. To avoid labelling, refer to people by their names instead of a label that may come off insensitive. However, keep in mind that different individuals prefer their own referrals. Ensure that you clarify and actively correct yourself according to their preference; for example, some prefer identity-first language (e.g., “I’m blind”), whereas others are more comfortable with people first (e.g., “I am an individual with blindness”).

Functioning labels are another detrimental form of ableist language. Using terms such as “low functioning” to describe someone who cannot form verbal words, can make them feel uncomfortable. Despite one’s inability to speak verbally, they are still able to function as well as you and I. This language is also generally quite restricting; someone who is deemed “high functioning” by society can experience off days, and being called “high functioning” in moments of stress can be invalidating and degrading.

No matter the terminology preferred by an individual with a disability, make sure to respect their decision and be conscious of your word choice.

2. Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a severe form of psychological manipulation. It is used to make someone question reality and, unfortunately, is a very common form of manipulation for people with disabilities.

Some people who have intellectual or neurological disabilities already struggle with low self-esteem, rendering them vulnerable to gaslighting. When you gaslight and downplay an individual's emotions, you encourage them to invalidate their own experiences.

Gaslighting an individual with a disability might look like telling them that their experience "wasn't that bad," or that they merely have to be "brave." Especially when you gaslight a person who has endured trauma, it's easy to cause long-term damage.

It is vital to believe and listen to people with disabilities. Try your best to understand their experiences.

Toxic positivity is another form of gaslighting, which involves excessive and ineffective use of positivity. Saying "look on the bright side" or "just be very brave!" completely dismisses the fact that someone is in need of help and that they may be struggling. Instead of engaging in toxic positivity, you can be there for them, validate their hardships, and offer ways to help.

3. Listen & Respect

Just like with any other interaction, you never know what the other person has to say. Remember to be patient and considerate.

Listen to what people have to say—regardless of their abilities. Those who have speech impediments or use alternative communication methods are often ignored because of others' internalized ableism. Never assume someone's capabilities by their appearance.

Be open to learn! If you accidentally slip up and use an ableist term, be open to correction. There is absolutely no reason why you should get defensive.

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4. Ableist language & Unlearning and Relearning

To be an excellent ally, you must first address your own internalized ableism, which may include existing ableist terminology in your daily vernacular.

In short, ableism involves discrimination against people with disabilities and/or a false perception of such individuals' inferiority compared to non-disabled people. This is due to society's constructed ideals of normalcy, intelligence, and worth.

Ableism may involve utilization of a disability as an insult/descriptor in casual use. Society has greatly normalized the use of ableist language as an insult; several common examples include the "r-word" (insert hyperlink to Halam's article) or phrases such as "you are so autistic." This is highly problematic because it implies that autism, a neurodevelopmental disability, is a joke. In reality, autism refers to a very real range of conditions that should not be joked about in such a casual manner.

Another form of common ableist language is the use of mental illness as a casual descriptor, with an immensely common remark being "I am so OCD."

This sentence downplays the reality of OCD, resulting in the general population seeing it as an adjective, instead of a disorder.

In order for our community to become more accepting, we need to start seeing disabilities in a positive light. We need to support each other instead of bringing marginalized groups down.

A fundamental step toward allyship is unlearning these ableist terms and replacing them with unproblematic words, such as "upset", "emotional", "organized,", and other words that do not correspond to a disability.

The next time you catch someone indulging in ableist behaviour, will you correct them, and educate them about why that is problematic?

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5. Infantilization

Infantilization is a situation that people with disabilities are all too familiar with.

Infantilizing an adult can look like talking to them as if they were a small child, making physical gestures (e.g., head tilting, excessive smiling, cheek-pinching, patting their head), using degrading language (e.g., calling an adult cute, precious, asking how old they are), and failing to recognize them as an adult. As humiliating as it sounds, adults with disabilities have to deal with this on the daily.

Unfortunately, people with developmental delays are the most susceptible to this type of ableism. Even if their speaking abilities are limited, they still deserve to be treated with respect. Someone who is 30-years-old has 30 years of life experience; they have extensive wisdom and knowledge that 5-year-old children do not. Therefore, you should *never* treat grown adults like children.

There are countless other ways to communicate with adults with disabilities.

For one, do not rush people who may have a speech impediment or a processing disorder; be patient and respectful of people's speech devices and abilities. Additionally, never speak to a caregiver instead of the person with a disability if the matter or questions concerns them. If they are unable to respond, let the caregiver respond, but continue directing the conversation towards the person it is about. People who are unable to speak know exactly what is going on, and it means the world to them to be treated equally and respectfully.

6. Validation

The struggles of people with disabilities are often dismissed or overlooked. Instead of gaslighting, you can validate their hardships and offer ways to help.

People with invisible disabilities frequently battle waves of fatigue. Most people dismiss their struggles because they look “fine” on the outside. Phrases such as, “I understand your struggle. Is there anything I can help you with?” provide validation. If someone you know is struggling with chronic fatigue, offer to help with their tasks, such as grocery shopping, laundry or dishwashing.

It is important to create an environment where people with disabilities may feel seen, heard, and respected.

7. Accessibility & Accommodations

Living in a world designed solely for non-disabled people is exhausting. Not only do people with disabilities face struggles that shouldn't exist, but they also have to fight for accessibility, often to no avail. Most people take their privileges for granted, as not everyone can walk up the steep steps to a store or independently eat out at a restaurant that does not provide braille menus.

To business owners: have you ever considered whether your locations are accessible? Are wheelchair users able to access everything? Do your menus have braille? Are your staff trained to assist a deaf or HoH individual? What about the correct way to lead someone who is blind or visually impaired?

Do not ask people why they need accommodations. Not everyone is comfortable sharing their medical history or why they need certain items. It is quite disrespectful to question someone's service dog, wheelchair, or assistive device in an attempt to deny them service.

Take time to selflessly advocate for inclusive public spaces! You never know how your actions can impact others.

8. Early education

Allies come in all ages! Although developing an inclusive mindset takes time, it is never too early to start young. Reading picture books featuring characters with disabilities, encouraging essential dialogue surrounding diversity, and promoting inclusivity are excellent ways to nurture acceptance and kindness in children.

A study at the New Brunswick Department of Education revealed that children with varying abilities perform stronger, and are better motivated to learn when surrounded with accepting children. Similarly, they concluded that inclusive classrooms benefited all children. Together, they formed strong friendships and were challenged daily to include and accept everyone's unique differences.

It is crucial to foster acceptance and inclusion at home so that children can carry over those skills to other social settings.

9. Shop Small

Do you want an immediate way to support adults with disabilities and demonstrate your evolving allyship? Supporting businesses run by people with disabilities is a great way to be an ally and score some awesome items. With a quick Google search, you'll find clothing stores, books, coffee shops, and more!

Despite neurodivergent adults being amazing critical and creative thinkers, 85% of college grads who have autism are unemployed. Corresponding to this disheartening statistic, people with disabilities are often underpaid and/or denied employment altogether, which is why a large portion resolve to start their own companies.

10. Advocate for disability rights

Living with a disability should not lead to a constant battle for one's rights to be viewed and respected as a human. It is imperative for allies to support individuals with disabilities by speaking up against ableism and ableist language, addressing ignorant remarks and/or mindsets, and turning every ableist remark into an opportunity for change and growth. To see community growth, we must all do our part to combat ableism and empower minority groups, regardless of ability.

When making political decisions, always consider people with disabilities and minority groups.

There is no model ally. Allyship is a lifelong journey to stand together with marginalized communities and show support. Individuals with disabilities live their lives, regularly fighting against ableism and discrimination. As one unified community, we must collaborate to advocate real change.

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“The learning curve for living with Dysautonomia is a steep one. I have the most common form of autonomic nervous system dysfunction, called POTS. POTS presents differently in each person, but is characterized by high heart rate, low blood pressure, and blood pooling. All of which become worse after position changes. Sitting up, standing up, and walking any length of distance puts me at risk of losing consciousness. I’ve learned to listen to my body and get down on the ground before I completely pass out, but I don’t always get a whole lot of warning. This makes daily activities like household chores, grocery shopping and social activities a challenge.

One year ago today, I was happy, healthy and had a great job that I loved. These days, I watch as my peers live the lives of normal 20-something’s and I struggle with the fact that most of their activities I’m just not physically capable of doing anymore.

I spent months praying for healing, praying for a miracle, for answers as to why this was happening. What did I do wrong?

How can I fix this? But I was going about it all wrong.

God is bigger than my understanding. I don’t know what will happen with my health, with my career, with my future, but I know that God’s got me. His plans are far greater than I could ever imagine. I’ve found immense peace and joy in letting go, and letting God take the reins. It isn’t always easy, but it’s so, so worth it. So I will listen. Whatever doors open and whatever doors close, I will follow Him, for I know that He has great things in store.”

-Courtney Bathe, a friend of Melina Thurmond