

Ableism and Disability Glossary

1. **Able bodied, able-minded:** Non-disabled persons is the preferred term. Also referred to as temporarily-able-bodied, since anyone can acquire a disability at any time.
2. **Ableism:** A system of attitudes, beliefs, and actions that communicates that persons with disabilities have less value than non-disabled persons. Ableism assumes that “normal” is a valid social construct. See also systemic ableism.
3. **Accessible/ accessibility:** Environments and activities in which architectural, programmatic, and communication barriers to participation have been eliminated.
4. **Accommodations:** Measures that allow full participation in an activity or service through equitable access specific to a person’s needs, e.g., providing a sign language interpreter, offering materials in large print, digital or Braille formats, describing visual elements, offering alternative foods, or avoiding flashing lights.
5. **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** Signed into law in 1990 and amended since then, this Act stipulates the minimum (not optimal) accessibility standards for covered programs and buildings. Most sections do not apply to religious entities due to lobbying efforts at the time.
6. **Agency:** The acknowledgement that all of us, including disabled persons, have voices and make independent decisions as actors in charge of our own lives.
7. **Ally:** A non-disabled person, or a person with a different disability (e.g., a Deaf person who advocates for accessibility for blind persons), who under the guidance of and alongside disabled persons, works for an inclusive and equitable church and society.
8. **Audism:** A variation of ableism that presumes that people who speak and hear are superior and discriminates against people using sign language and other communication.
9. **Barriers:** Aspects of society and the church which exclude or prevent full active participation of persons with disabilities. These include architectural (stairs), communication (verbal messages), programmatic (not planning for disability accommodation) and attitudinal (“we don’t have any here”) barriers.
10. **Belonging:** Since “inclusion” implies that one group has the power to decide who to include, this term recognizes that God’s kin-dom is for all of us and that all who wish to join in Christian community may share their gifts as welcome and equal participants.
11. **Bias:** Stigma due to a specific characteristic, in this case prejudice or discrimination against a person because they have a disability.
12. **Disability:** Having a physical or mental impairment that affects daily functioning within society. Disability is a social construct defined by the same society that exacerbates the impairment through structures and systems that are not accessible or accommodating.
13. **Disparities:** Inequities in health, income, education, and other outcomes of disabled people compared with non-disabled people.



14. **Diversity:** Celebrating disability as one of the many differences in how God created humans, and embracing that all of us have gifts and graces for the common good.
15. **Equity:** Providing what each individual needs in order to participate in communal life.
16. **Etiquette:** A term falling out of favor in the disability community because it implies that disabled people need “special” treatment. Includes hospitality practices for interacting politely with people who have specific disabilities, e.g., by church ushers.
17. **Eugenics:** A pseudoscientific approach that assumes that some bodies and minds are superior and often favors abortion, sterilization, non-treatment, or euthanasia of persons who do not meet a given standard. Once promoted by the Methodist Church, the practice is still pervasive today, hence Resolution #3184 offers repentance.
18. **Explicit bias:** Overt stereotyping and discrimination in which a person willfully treats persons with disabilities differently and more negatively than non-disabled persons.
19. **Hidden/ invisible/ non-apparent disabilities:** Disabilities not physically evident to others, but that impact one’s life and may require accommodations for full participation. Examples include people with mental health needs, back injuries, severe allergies, chronic fatigue or pain, and autism.
20. **Identity-first language:** Language preferred by specific groups such as culturally Deaf people and autistic people that includes their disability as an important part of their identity. Compare this with person-first language.
21. **Impairment:** The physical or psychological portion of a disability due to an organ or body part that does not work in the typical fashion, e.g., low vision, a paralyzed extremity, or a learning disability.
22. **Implicit bias:** Unconscious attitudes and prejudice against people with disabilities.
23. **Inclusion/ inclusive:** Efforts to make programs or ministries open to persons of all abilities, and to facilitate integration of children or adults with and without disabilities.
24. **Infantilization:** Treating adults with disabilities as children, shown in tone of voice, use of words like “girl” or “boy,” and a belief that people with disabilities are non-sexual.
25. **Internalized ableism:** Negative societal messages about disability that are believed by people with disabilities, which leads to low self-esteem and self-regard.
26. **Intersectionality:** Added disadvantages faced by people who are part of more than one stigmatized group, e.g., non-Caucasian, female, LBGTQIA+, poor, or immigrants.
27. **Marginalized:** Groups, including people with disabilities, who are outside the societal power structures, whose voices are not consulted, and for whom current structures are not designed.
28. **Microaggressions:** Casual insults and offensive actions, often not intended by the offender, experienced frequently by disabled people and others in oppressed groups.
29. **Neurodiversity paradigm:** A worldview that realizes that brains operate in varying ways. Being neurodivergent is an umbrella term that includes autism, dyslexia, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other variations from “typical” processing.



30. **Normal/ normate/ normalcy:** Exhibiting species-typical behavior and characteristics – a social construct that is abused to mislabel and harm many disabled people.
31. **Othering:** Dismissing people who fit into a labeled category such as disability as not belonging, being of less worth or importance, or even as being sub-human.
32. **Pass:** Hiding one’s disability to fit in or avoid other negative consequences.
33. **Patronization:** A non-disabled person assuming to know what is best for a person with a disability, or treating them in a condescending manner.
34. **Person-first language:** A writing convention which places the person as the subject and the disability as one attribute, e.g., child who has cerebral palsy, woman who is blind, man who is paralyzed, etc. This syntax is typically preferred by non-disabled professionals and family members, and some - often older - disabled individuals.
35. **Plain language:** Selecting words that can be easily understood. Avoiding long sentences, jargon, and theological language and focusing instead on getting the message across.
36. **Privilege, able:** The unearned advantages that non-disabled people encounter daily with no awareness of their privilege, including buildings, programs, and communication systems that are designed for non-disabled people.
37. **Speaking center:** Placing the perspectives and voices of disabled people in the forefront of the conversation when discussing issues and solutions relating to disability.
38. **Systemic/ institutionalized ableism:** Practices embedded into any power structure that discriminate against people with disabilities and lead to disparities in education, housing, justice, healthcare, employment, and more.
39. **Trauma-informed practices:** Looking beyond behavior to understand the impact of accumulated experiences of oppression and adversities common to marginalized groups, and providing the support needed to cope and participate.
40. **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:** A human rights document adopted in 2006 which aims to improve the status of and opportunities for people with disabilities around the world.
41. **Universal design:** A set of principles whereby the built environment is designed to be flexible and adaptive enough to meet the needs of nearly all users.
42. **Universal design for learning:** An application of universal design which offers learners multiple ways of perceiving, engaging with, and responding to information.
43. **Vulnerable adult:** A person 18 or older who is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation, typically because they are unable to recognize risk, communicate choices, or remove themselves safely from potential or actual harm.

Written by Deaconess Lynn Swedberg – updated 8-18-23