

# A Guide for Educators: Becoming an Advocate of Students with Disabilities

By April Fields



# Overview

The word disability can bring up many feelings for people. For someone who isn't disabled, it may bring up uncomfortable feelings due to lack of knowledge, or bring up the misconceptions that they have about disabilities. It's time for everyone to learn about disabilities and make changes to make our world a more accessible and accepting place.

For educators, many of us need to learn more about misconceptions, learn more about specific disabilities, and think about the accommodations and modifications that we can make to our learning environments and teaching styles to help students with disabilities learn, succeed, and live fulfilling lives.

This presentation is going to dive into disabilities, euphemisms, People First Language and Identity First Language, ableism, changes that everyone can help make, IDEA, and tips for educators specifically to help disabled people.



# What is a disability?

**Disability:** a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions

-Emily Ladau

More than 1 billion people in the world have a disability



# What are disability euphemisms?

Disability euphemisms are terms that people use to substitute words or phrases that seem offensive to disabled people.

Examples:

- Differently abled
- Handi-capable
- Mentally or physically challenged
- Special needs
- Twice exceptional

Instead of using these terms, just say disability



**It's time to reframe how we think..**



# People First Language v. Identity First Language

## **People First Language (PFL):**

Puts the word “person” first before a reference to a disability is made. It acknowledges that people who have disabilities are people first instead of just being seen for their disability.

Example: “A person with Autism”

## **Identity First Language (IFL):**

States the disability word before the person to acknowledge the disability as a part of what makes a person who they are. The disability is an identity that helps connect people to a community, culture, and history.

Example: “Autistic person”

# PFL or IFL?

Different people with disabilities prefer different terms! The best thing that you can do is to ask the person what they prefer. If you are unable to do that, then default to Person First Language until told otherwise.

Do NOT ever refer to someone by their mobility equipment! Instead of “cane user” you can say “person who uses a cane”.



# What is ableism?

**Ableism:** attitudes, actions, and circumstances that devalue people because they are disabled or perceived as having a disability.

-Emily Ladau

## Examples:

- Less than 25% of New York City subway stations have elevators. The lack of accessibility limits the freedom of disabled people to get around.
- People with disabilities are the only population that can legally be paid less than minimum wage.
- Some major companies do not make their services accessible to disabled people, even though the law says that they have to.

# What can we change?



## Our etiquette

- Do not make assumptions
- Treat and communicate with disabled people the same way that you would with anyone else
- Always ask before you help
- Ask questions when appropriate



## Our knowledge

Listen to podcasts and TED Talks, read books, and have conversations with people who have disabilities to learn more about them and what to help change in the world to make it more accessible for all



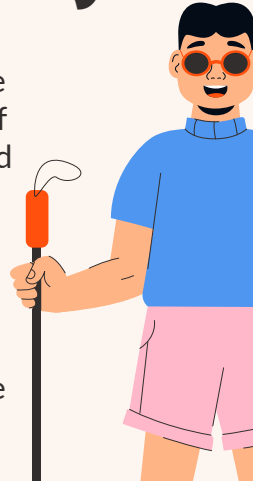
## Our media

- Find positive portrayals of disabled people in tv shows and movies
- Do not share “inspiration porn”
- Stay away from stigmatizing mental illnesses and physical differences



## Our advocacy

Support disabled people by getting rid of stereotypes and helping fight to make policy changes for accessibility and rights of disabled people

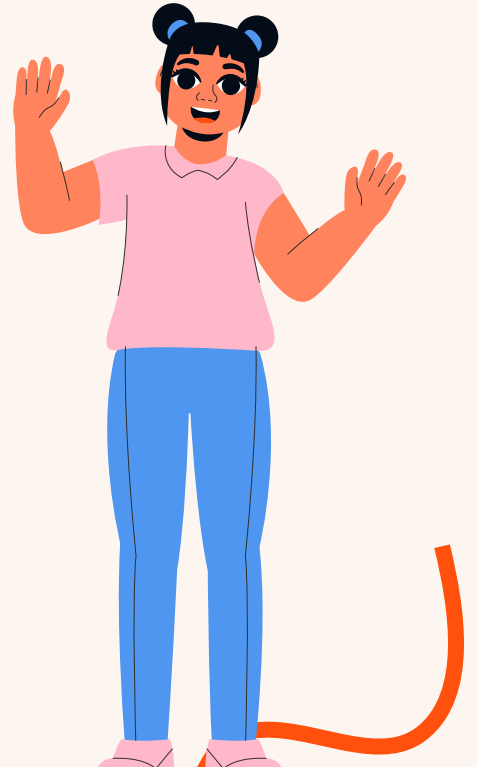


# Individuals with Disabilities Education ACT (IDEA)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

**IDEA Part C:** Infants and toddlers, birth through 2 years old, with disabilities and their families receive early intervention services.

**IDEA Part B:** Children and youth, ages 3-21 years old, receive special education and related services.



# The 13 Categories of IDEA



**1** Autism

**2** Deaf-Blindness

**3** Deafness

**4** Emotional Disturbance

**5** Hearing Impairments

**6** Intellectual Disability

**7** Multiple Disabilities

**8** Orthopedic Impairment

**9** Other Health Impairment

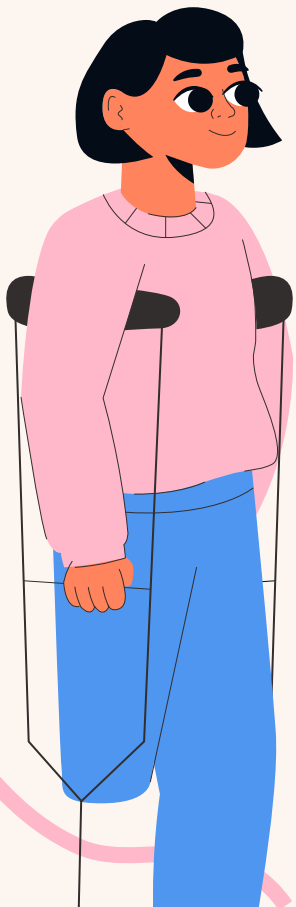
**10** Specific Learning Disability

**11** Speech or Language Impairment

**12** Traumatic Brain Injury

**13** Visual Impairment, including Blindness





# 278,916

students ages 3-21 served under IDEA, Part B  
in Ohio in the 2022-2023 school year

# Individualized Education Plans & 504 Plans

**Individualized Education Plans (IEPs):** A plan that is written for students who have been diagnosed with a disability listed under IDEA and need individualized special education services. Goals are written that involve intensive interventions that are data based, and a special educator provides the interventions.

**504 Plans:** Plans written for students who have been diagnosed with a disability not listed under IDEA and the disability does not directly affect their educational performance, but it does affect their daily life activities. Students receive all of their education in a general education setting. Accommodations may include frequent physical breaks, preferential seating, visual reminders, etc.

# What can we do as educators?

- Make sure that our school grounds are **accessible** for all- including playgrounds, classrooms, and moving around the school building.
- Have materials that are accessible to all students such as text to speech devices, audio books, and other **assistive technology**.
- Use correct **language** when talking about and talking with students who are disabled.
- Include **inclusive** classroom materials, such as books, posters, pictures, etc. to make all students feel included.
- Create **self-affirming** activities to help students believe in themselves and their abilities.



# What can we do as educators?

- Provide **accommodations** for students such as dimmed lighting, fidgets, alternative seating, etc.
- Build on the **strengths** and **prior knowledge** that students already have when learning new concepts.
- **Collaborate** with other IEP team members, including the student's family.
- **Respect** and listen to diverse perspectives in and out of the classroom.

**Continue educating yourself on disabilities and become an advocate for making our world more accessible to all.**

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