

Inclusion Compendium



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Accessibility is more than a Ramp

A practical reflection on physical, communicative and relational barriers

When we think of accessibility, the image that often comes to mind is a wheelchair ramp at the entrance of a building. While such measures are vital, accessibility goes far beyond bricks, slopes, and doors. True inclusion requires us to look at physical, communicative, and relational barriers that shape how people experience spaces, services, and communities.

Physical barriers are the most visible. Narrow corridors, heavy doors, uneven pavements, or poorly lit rooms can make participation difficult or impossible for people with disabilities. Yet designing for accessibility benefits everyone—parents with strollers, older adults, or anyone navigating temporary injury. A ramp may be a start, but universal design ensures that all people can move and act freely in a space.

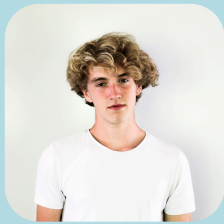
Communicative barriers are often overlooked. A presentation without subtitles, a sign without Braille, or complex written instructions can exclude entire groups from understanding and engaging. Accessible communication means using multiple channels—visual, auditory, tactile, and plain language—so that information is shared, not withheld. It is about asking: Can everyone hear, see, read, and understand what is being said?

Relational barriers are the least visible but perhaps the most powerful. Attitudes, assumptions, and stereotypes can make people feel unwelcome, even when the physical environment is barrier-free. True accessibility requires respect, empathy, and openness. It means creating environments where diversity is not just tolerated but actively valued, and where people feel safe to participate without fear of judgment or exclusion.

Accessibility, then, is not a checklist but a practice. It is about recognizing the different ways people interact with the world and designing with these differences in mind. When we move beyond ramps and embrace a holistic view of accessibility, we do more than remove obstacles—we create communities where everyone belongs.



THEY CALLED IT Different



“You don’t look like your parents. You were adopted, weren’t you?”, my friend asked me one day, which hurt me a lot. I felt like a I had just got stabbed in my chest. (Darius, 13)

“You are emo!”, some schoolmates said to me, just because I was wearing a black T-shirt and black jeans. I considered it an insult, as at that moment I was actually sad and that comment made me feel worse. (Sofia, 13)



“Your laugh sounds as if you were an animal”, my friend exclaimed after she heard me laugh really loudly. Even if that comment was not meant to hurt me, it did, anyway. I’d never thought about my way of laughing like that before. Ever since, I’ve felt insecure about who I am and how I am perceived by people around me. (Ștefania, 15)

“You’re annoying, you should talk less”, my friend told me when I was making a joke. I was shocked at his comment, because there were people who had told me that, on the contrary, I should talk more. I became even shyer after that. (Diana, 13)



“Look who’s coming; the school mare! Are you looking for some grass to graze?”, some boys began to laugh when they saw me. Just because I was a boy and preferred to have long hair, that made them call me a mare. I really suffered because of that. (Yanis, 14)

“You are too fat to become a ballerina”, they said, when I told them what my dream was. Back home, I cried a lot and began to hate my own body. I never took ballet classes after that. (Adelina, 13)





What Inclusion Really Means

Inclusion is a word we hear often – in schools, workplaces, communities – but it’s also a word that can be misunderstood. To truly build inclusive spaces, we need to understand what inclusion is and what it is not.

Belonging: Inclusion means making sure everyone feels like they belong – not just that they are allowed in the room, but that their voice matters.

Equal Opportunities: It means creating systems where everyone has the same chances to succeed, no matter their background, abilities, language, gender, or identity.

Active Participation: Inclusion is not just about being present. It’s about being involved, heard, and valued.

Removing Barriers: Sometimes, people are excluded not on purpose, but because no one thought about their needs. Inclusion means looking for and removing these barriers.

Learning from Differences: Inclusive environments value different experiences, perspectives, and ways of thinking. They see diversity as a strength, not a problem.



And What It Doesn't

Just Being “Nice”: Being kind is important – but it’s not the same as being inclusive. You can be nice and still exclude someone by ignoring their needs or voice.

One-Size-Fits-All: Inclusion doesn’t mean treating everyone exactly the same. It means giving people what they need to succeed, which might look different for different people.

A “Special” Favor: Inclusion is not charity. It’s a right. Everyone deserves to be included – not because we’re doing them a favor, but because it’s fair and just.

Only About Disability: Inclusion is often linked to disability, but it’s much broader. It includes race, culture, language, gender, religion, sexuality, and more.

A Final Goal: Inclusion isn’t something you “achieve” and forget. It’s an ongoing process of listening, learning, and improving.

Inclusive spaces are better for everyone. They are more creative, more respectful, and more just. When people feel included, they thrive – and so do the communities around them.

Let’s move beyond just being welcoming. Let’s build places where everyone can truly belong.

INTERSECTIONALITY



Why Some People Face Double (or Triple) Barriers

Have you ever wondered why some children or young people seem to face more obstacles than others, even in the same classroom or community? The answer often lies in intersectionality. This word may sound complicated, but the idea is simple: sometimes disadvantages overlap, making life harder for certain individuals.

Intersectionality looks at how different aspects of a person's identity, such as gender, race, disability, or family income, can combine and create unique challenges. Each of these alone can affect someone's opportunities. But when they come together, the barriers are not just added, they are multiplied.

For example:

- A girl may face gender stereotypes that limit her choices.
- A student with a disability may face accessibility issues at school.
- A child from a low-income family may struggle with lack of resources.

Now imagine a girl who has a disability and lives in poverty. She may experience all these barriers at once: less access to learning materials, fewer chances to participate in social life, and lower expectations from others.

What can schools and communities do?

Listen carefully. Each child's story is unique. Taking time to hear their experiences can reveal hidden barriers.

Create safe spaces. A school or community center that celebrates diversity in language, culture, and abilities helps everyone feel welcome.

Adapt support. Instead of "one size fits all," provide flexible help: for example, scholarships for low-income families that also cover special learning tools for children with disabilities.

Work together. Teachers, families, social workers, and local organizations should collaborate, because intersectional problems need shared solutions.

When schools, communities, and services look only at one factor at a time, they may miss the full picture. Supporting "a girl" or "a student with a disability" is good, but it may not be enough if she is also from a migrant family or lives in financial hardship. Intersectionality reminds us that real lives are complex, and solutions must be sensitive to that complexity.

Understanding intersectionality does not mean labeling children with endless categories. It means becoming more aware of how life circumstances interact. With this awareness, we can design fairer policies, build inclusive classrooms, and show genuine empathy. By recognizing intersectionality, we move closer to a society where no child is invisible, where every girl, boy, or non-binary student, regardless of background, ability, or family situation, has the chance to thrive.

THEY CALLED IT Different



“Why are you so skinny? Don’t your parents feed you or are you starving yourself? You look like a walking stick”, my classmates keep laughing. But it’s just the way my body is and I can’t do anything to change it. In fact, I like the way I look, I just don’t like when people make this kind of comments. (Maia, 16)

“You are a girl, you can’t join the soccer team”, my PE teacher told me. That made me feel sad and unfairly treated. I know that girls can be just as good as boys in sports and everyone deserves a chance to play and show their skills. (Amalia, 12)



“You are too short to play this game with us”, some kids in the park told me and pushed me aside. I felt small, not just in height, but inside too. I just wanted to be included and have fun like everybody else. (Clement, 15)

“Maybe you should just give up. This Roblox game is not for everyone”. The chat about my game skills was a bit toxic and I got upset when insults were thrown at me. (Rayssa, 12)



“I don’t want her in our group, she’s not a popular girl”, one of my classmates said about me. It made me sad, but then I realised it’s OK to be different and I don’t need to be their friend, because I can find someone better. (Maria, 14)

“We don’t want to play with someone whose parents are divorced”. That’s what a group of girls told me, which hurt my feelings. We should all be kind and not judge anyone because of their family issues. Acceptance helps us make friends and have a happier life. (Antonia, 13)



EDUCATING FOR INCLUSION: WHERE TO START

A practical article for parents, community members or informal educators

Inclusion does not begin in schools or official programmes—it begins in everyday life. Whether you are a parent, a neighbour, or a volunteer, you play an important role in shaping attitudes toward diversity and belonging. But where can we start?

1. Model respect in daily interactions.

Children and young people learn more from what we *do* than from what we say. Greeting people politely, listening without interrupting, and showing patience with different ways of communicating all send a powerful message: everyone deserves dignity.

2. Talk openly about differences.

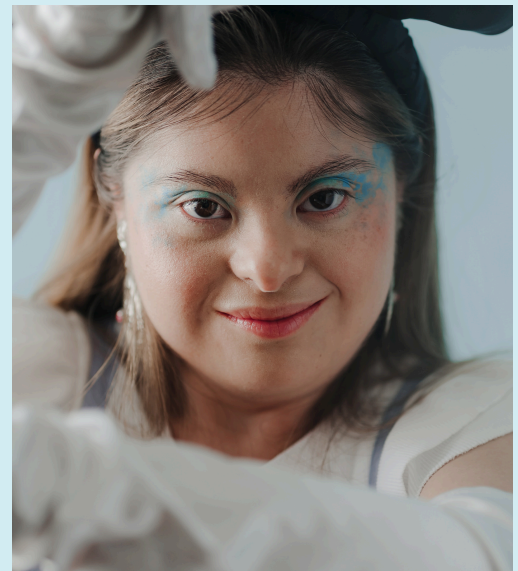
Differences in ability, culture, or background are a natural part of human life. Avoid hiding these realities; instead, explain them in simple, age-appropriate ways. Curiosity is healthy, and honest conversations can replace stereotypes with understanding.

3. Create accessible spaces at home and in the community.

Accessibility can be simple: clear pathways, labels with symbols, or quiet corners for children who need less stimulation. Small adjustments show that inclusion is not only for institutions—it starts with how we organise our everyday environments.

4. Encourage participation, not perfection.

Whether it's a community game, a craft session, or a family event, the goal is to make sure everyone can join in. Adjust rules, adapt tools, or offer support. Inclusion means valuing participation over performance.



5. Build empathy through stories and experiences.

Books, films, and community events are powerful tools to open minds. Share stories of people from different backgrounds and abilities, and, whenever possible, connect with real people who can share their experiences.

Inclusion is not a one-time project—it is a habit, built step by step. By starting small, practicing respect, and making conscious choices, parents, community members, and informal educators can create environments where every child and adult feels they truly belong.



Neurodivergence

in Everyday Life

WHAT IT IS AND HOW TO RESPECT IT

By someone like me, who sees the world a little differently

Hi! I'm 9 years old. I have something called Autism and ADHD. That means my brain works in a different way. I'm still me – I laugh, play, and learn like you – but sometimes I feel things more or in another way. This is called being neurodivergent. Lots of people are! It's not a sickness. It's just a different way of being.

At school, I sometimes feel like there are a thousand thoughts running in my head. The lights can be too bright, and when everyone talks at the same time, I feel dizzy or scared. I want to learn, but my body feels like it wants to jump or move. I try hard to sit still, but it's not easy. When I go shopping with Mum, trying on clothes can feel itchy or tight, and music in the shop makes me want to cry. It's not because I'm naughty. It just feels too much in my body and my brain.



At school, I feel better when my teacher: talks slowly and clearly, gives me time to answer, lets me wear my headphones when it's noisy and shows me pictures or a "Now / Next" board so I know what's happening.

I love when I can go to the quiet corner to calm down with soft lights or things to touch. My classmates help when they: don't laugh when I flap or move a lot, let me take breaks and ask me what I like instead of guessing.

At shops, it helps if: there's a quiet time with no loud music, I can bring my fidget toys and people don't rush me.

Not all brains work the same — and that's okay! Some people see, hear, or feel the world more strongly. If you see someone covering their ears, spinning, or looking upset, don't stare or laugh. Be kind. Ask if they need help.

You can't always see someone is neurodivergent. So just being calm and respectful helps everyone feel safe.

Let's build a world where everyone feels okay being themselves.



THEY CALLED IT Different



“What a funny pair of glasses! You look like the ugly Betty soap opera character.” I was in the third grade when my deskmate made that comment. I was so embarrassed that I stopped wearing those glasses for the next two months. (Daria, 13)

“My grandma prefers my cousin. She cares for her more and accuses me of things, even if sometimes it is my cousin’s fault, not mine. I feel lonely and not loved when I go to the countryside, because my grandma doesn’t spend time with me, but with her.” (Clara, 12)



“I remember back in the 5th grade when kids started making remarks about my tooth gap saying, I bet you could fit a cent in there. For them, it was something funny, but for me, it wasn’t” (Darius, 15)

“It is said that people with wide forehead are very smart. But you seem to be the exception”. I cried a lot after a classmate said that to me. I was sad for two reasons: that classmate considered me stupid and his comment deepened my insecurity about my facial traits. (Antonia, 12)



“When I was a kid, my sister and cousins used to make fun of my dark complexion, by laughing and saying - You can’t go outside when it’s too late, because we can’t see you in the dark. They thought it was funny, but I didn’t.” (Andrei, 16)

“In my primary school, the teacher made differences between the pupils in her class. She always gave high grades to her favourite pupils, even if they didn’t answer correctly. It was right the opposite with me, which made me hate school. (Eliza, 15)





Words matter

How does discriminatory language affect us?

Discriminatory language is speech or writing that demeans, excludes, or treats people unfairly based on characteristics like race, gender, religion, disability, age, or sexual orientation. It reinforces stereotypes, promotes prejudice, and can harm individuals or groups by making them feel unwelcome, disrespected, or marginalized.

Examples of discriminatory language include racial slurs that insult someone's ethnicity or skin color, sexist remarks such as "Women can't be good leaders" or "That's a man's job," and ageist comments like "too old to learn" or "too young to understand." Other harmful expressions include ableist language, such as using "crazy" or "crippled" as insults, homophobic or transphobic terms that mock a person's sexual orientation or gender identity, and religious intolerance that ridicules or stereotypes someone's beliefs or traditions.

- **Racial slurs** – using derogatory terms for someone's ethnicity or skin color.
- **Sexist remarks** – saying "Women can't be good leaders" or "That's a man's job."
- **Ageist comments** – calling someone "too old to learn" or "too young to understand."
- **Ableist language** – using words like "crazy" or "crippled" to insult someone.
- **Homophobic or transphobic terms** – mocking someone's sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Religious intolerance** – ridiculing or stereotyping someone's beliefs or traditions.

Changing discriminatory language starts with using respectful terms that acknowledge people's identity and dignity. Learning and practicing inclusive language helps avoid outdated or offensive expressions, while asking individuals about their preferred names, pronouns, and labels ensures personal respect. It is equally important to avoid stereotypes, focusing instead on each person as an individual rather than making assumptions about their group. Continuous self-education on the impact of words deepens understanding and encourages communication that fosters equality and respect for everyone.

Our words have the power to either harm and divide or to respect and unite!

How it makes others feel:

Hurt and offended – feeling insulted or disrespected.

Excluded – sensing they don't belong or are not accepted.

Angry or frustrated – reacting to unfair or unjust treatment.

Lower self-esteem – doubting their worth or abilities.

Isolated – withdrawing from others due to feeling judged.



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