

## Disability 101

### A One Page Primer on Disability Language & Scholarship

Introducing disability as a natural part of human diversity and attending to the social factors of disability exclusion is crucial for an inclusive classroom (Broderick and Lalvani 2017). Particularly when it comes to discussions of sexuality, consent, and relationships, disabled\* students are often excluded, either explicitly or implicitly, from adequate education (Campbell et al. 2020). This exclusion often assumes that disabled people are either hypersexual or completely asexual (Whitney 2006).

These assumptions of sexuality are often incredibly gendered and further associated with specific impairments, with feminine and physically disabled people (as well as some intellectually disabled folks such as those with Down Syndrome) labelled as asexual (Mackeig. Conversely, masculine and other intellectually disabled folks are largely labelled hypersexual or deviant. Combatting these stereotypes allows for disabled students to have agency, can help prevent instances of vulnerability to relationship abuse (Shah 2017), and allows disabled people and their peers to see them as capable of and deserving of relationships at a platonic and romantic level.

This inclusion of disability in lessons around sexuality and gender orientation is particularly important because, just like the general population, many disabled and neurodivergent people, especially those on the autism spectrum (George and Stokes 2018), identify as queer and are gender nonconforming. However, these stories are largely absent from media representations and academic literature, showing that **intersectionality is key** as those who are queer *and* disabled (not to mention other overlapping identities) are still deeply marginalized.

#### \*A note on language:

A more extensive glossary of disability terms can be found below; however, this one pager, the lesson plans, and other accompanying documents here use **identity first language** (disabled person). This is in alignment with disability activists and the broader disabled community who argue that **person first language** (person with a disability) unnecessarily separates their disability from their identity, or doesn't consider it as an identity label at all. Most government documents and curriculum still opt for person first language. Use whichever makes you feel most comfortable to teach with but telling students that **both are valid language and usage depends on the individual disabled person's preference** can help convey the power of language.

Avoid using any other pejorative terms or slurs such as handicapped (included in glossary below). Also **avoid using allusions to disability** such as differently abled, "special," or handicapable, as these are widely regarded by the disabled community as patronizing and offensive. Speak directly and clearly.

**Glossary Link:** <https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>

**Further Reading:**

- <https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/10-principles-of-disability-justice>
- <https://ycdiversity.org/who-and-what-we-fight-for/disability-justice-and-youth/>
- <http://www.poconlineclassroom.com/disability-justice>
- [http://meloukhia.net/2016/11/wheres\\_the\\_sex\\_ed\\_for\\_disabled\\_kids/](http://meloukhia.net/2016/11/wheres_the_sex_ed_for_disabled_kids/)
- <https://odpc.ucsf.edu/advocacy/sexuality-sexual-health/our-sexuality-our-health-a-disabled-advocates-guide-to#pdf>
- <https://www.disabilityintersectionalitysummit.com/access-is-love/>

**References:**

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- MacKeigan, Tanya. 2021. "Sexual Citizenship Through Resistance: A Movement That Centers Disabled Women's Voices." *Disability & Society* 36(4):656–77. doi: [10.1080/09687599.2020.1751077](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1751077).
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- George, Rita, and Mark A. Stokes. 2018. "Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation in Autism Spectrum Disorder." *Autism* 22(8):970–82. doi: [10.1177/1362361317714587](https://doi.org/10.1177/1362361317714587).
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