



# Ways to make your community more welcoming and inclusive: Advice from people with an intellectual disability

May 2023



## Meet Our Self-Advocate Co-Creators



*Image description:*  
Shane and his wife Brenda pose for a photo at their son's wedding. Shane is a white man, with short brown hair and a short beard. They are both in formal clothing and smiling at the camera.

### Shane Haddad

Hello, my name is Shane Haddad, self advocate. I've been married to my wife Brenda for 34 years with 3 children and a granddaughter. I strive for full inclusion all across the world, *Nothing About Us, Without Us*. I have been President of People First of Canada. I love advocating for inclusive communities across Canada. I have presented at the United Nations. I enjoyed working on this project.



*Image description:*  
Manjeet smiles at the camera. She is a young woman of Indian descent. She has shoulder length dark hair and dark eyes. She is wearing a black top with a colourful print.

### Manjeet

Manjeet is a self-advocate from Western Canada. She is a strong advocate for herself and for the rights of people with disabilities. She is passionate about people having choice and control in their own lives. She advocates for person-centered support that puts the person with a disability in the driver's seat.

## — About this document

This document is for people who want to be good friends, neighbours, and co-workers to people with an intellectual disability.

Inclusion Canada and people with an intellectual disability (self-advocates) created this document together.

We share ideas about how to include people at work, at school, at home, and in the community. The document has advice directly from self-advocates.

We ask questions to help you reflect on ways to make your community more welcoming and inclusive. We want people with an intellectual disability to be fully included all across Canada.

“I know from my experience lots of times people don’t want to talk to me because I have a disability. They’re afraid to talk to me because they don’t know how to approach me. They don’t know how to talk to me because they think that they’re going to offend me or hurt my feelings for asking some questions.”

- Self-Advocate

## — Who are people with an intellectual disability?

Each person with an intellectual disability is unique. There is lots of diversity among people with an intellectual disability. Each person has different needs, interests, and opinions.

People with an intellectual disability have many different identities. This includes being parents, siblings, employees, volunteers, entrepreneurs, and community members. Some people with an intellectual disability are Indigenous. Some people with an intellectual disability are members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Some people with an intellectual disability are immigrants.

We can’t speak for all people with an intellectual disability because each person’s experience is different.

We believe our communities are richer when everyone is included. By reading this document you are helping make this happen. Thank you!

## — What should I do when I meet someone with an intellectual disability?

Self-advocates shared their advice about how to make people with an intellectual disability feel included:

- Say “hi”. Acknowledge that we’re people. Get to know us.
- Treat adults with disabilities as adults. Don’t talk down to us.

- Respect our right to make decisions. We are the experts of our own lives. Understand that we may need extra support.
- Speak directly to us. Ask our permission before talking to our support worker.
- Use respectful language. Some words like the R-word are never OK. If you don't know what words to use, ask us.
- Learn how to communicate with us. Ask us about the best ways to communicate with us. Our family members and supporters can help too.
- Use plain language so we can participate fully. When you talk with us, use short, everyday words. Give us the chance to ask questions.
- Learn how to support us. Don't assume you know what we need or want. Ask us.
- Think about how you like to be treated. Show us that same respect.

## — What if I make a mistake?

Everyone makes mistakes. You won't always say or do the right thing. How you handle these learning opportunities matters.

- Expect that you will make mistakes.
- Accept feedback. Listen when someone tells you that you've done something hurtful. Thank them for telling you. Let the person know you value them.
- Apologize. Be sincere. Take responsibility for your mistake. Even if you didn't mean to be hurtful, acknowledge that you caused harm. Don't try to defend what you did.
- Change your behaviour. Learn from your mistake. Decide how you will act differently next time. Take time to learn about disability and inclusion. Don't expect people with disabilities to educate you.

The next few pages have ideas about how to be welcoming and inclusive at work, at school, at home, and in the community.

**"Talk to me nicely and respectfully. Support me. Accept me for who I really am as a person, and not judge me by my looks. Flaws and all. I'm not perfect but I still want to be accepted as a person. Just allow me to be me."**

**- Self-Advocate**

## As you read each section, think about these things:

1. How can I **listen** to people with an intellectual disability and their families? Am I hearing their experiences and opinions?
2. How can I **learn** more about inclusion? Are there things I don't know enough about? Whose responsibility is it to teach me?
3. Do I **ask** people with an intellectual disability about what they need and want? How can I avoid making assumptions or judgements?
4. Do I **act** when I see people with an intellectual disability being excluded? If not, what is stopping me?



## At Work

As a co-worker or boss, you can help make people with an intellectual disability feel welcome and included at work.

People with an intellectual disability and their families are also customers. People support businesses that treat customers well. Inclusion is good for business.

**"We want people to see the ability first. [Inclusive and welcoming employers] get you to do things. They have faith in you that you'll do it right."**

**- Self-Advocate**

## These questions can help you think of ways to make your workplace more inclusive.

- Does your workplace employ people with an intellectual disability?
- Are there barriers that prevent people with disabilities from being hired? For example, unnecessary job requirements?
- Are employees with disabilities invited to social events like staff holiday parties, beer & wing night, or team-building activities?
- Are employees with disabilities treated as valuable members of the team? Are they trusted to do their jobs well? Are they encouraged to grow in their career?
- Are employees with disabilities paid the same as employees without disabilities? Do they get promoted?
- Are **all** employees (with and without disabilities) asked about the accommodations they need to do their job well? Are the supports provided person-centered?
- Is your workplace accessible? Do you know what accessibility looks like for people with intellectual disabilities? The [Inclusive Workplace](#) can help!

- If employees work remotely, how are they supported to do their job?
- How are customers with disabilities treated at your business? Do staff members receive training about how to support customers with disabilities?

"Lots of times we'd go for coffee, and you can tell by the way they serve you whether they want you in there or not. [If they want you there, they treat you] like they treat everyone else. They talk to you."

- Self-Advocate





## At School

Students, parents, and teachers all have important roles in creating an inclusive school community.

### These questions can help you think of ways to make your neighbourhood school more inclusive.

- Are children with an intellectual disability educated at their local neighbourhood school? Are they provided with the accommodations and support they need to be successful?
- Do children *with* and *without* disabilities interact at school? Are they part of the same classroom? Do they eat lunch together?

- Are children with an intellectual disability included on field trips and at social events like school dances?
- Do children with an intellectual disability have choices about who they spend time with and what activities they participate in?
- Is the school and playground accessible for all children?
- Do sports team and social clubs at the school include children with disabilities? Do coaches have training about inclusive recreation?
- Do parents of children *without* disabilities play an active role in championing the importance of inclusive education?
- Are lessons designed so that all students can learn together? Are students encouraged to help and learn from each other?
- Do lesson plans include teaching students about disability and its history in Canada? [Truths of Institutionalization: Past and Present](#) can help!

**“What worked really well for me, was being able to be in the regular classrooms as much as possible. Definitely with at least some modifications. Make it age appropriate. Person centered, in plain language.”**  
- Self-Advocate

## My neighbourhood school isn't inclusive. What should I do?

Speak up. Whether you (or your child) have a disability or not, let the school know how important it is that **everyone belongs**. Every child has the right to an inclusive education. Every child should feel safe and accepted at school.

Share resources like [Inclusive Education Canada](#) with the school.

Get involved with school activities. Suggest ways to make these activities more inclusive for all children.



## At Home

The values we teach at home can have a big impact on our lives. We learn important lessons about how to treat other people. These lessons come from parents, siblings, and other role models.

Children who grow up in inclusive households and communities can teach adults a lot about how to be a good friend to people with disabilities.

**“Don't be afraid to walk up to somebody with an intellectual disability and introduce yourself and get to know them.”**

**- Self-Advocate**



## These questions can help you think of ways that your family can be more inclusive at home.

- Has your family ever talked about disability? How should people with disabilities be treated? Where should people with disabilities live, learn, work and play?
- Are people with disabilities included in your children or family birthday parties?
- Do the TV shows, books, and movies your family enjoys, include people with disabilities? What kinds of roles do they play? How are they treated? Does the show, book or movie reinforce any myths or stereotypes about people with disabilities?
- Do you follow people with disabilities on social media? What are you learning from them? [This is Ableism](#) is a great place to start!
- Has your family talked about why some words are hurtful and should not be used?
- Do the members of your family know what to do if they see someone being bullied in person or online?
- Has your family talked about personal responsibility and respecting the choices of other people?

“Parents need to be positive role models. The way you can be a positive role model is [to] show them in actions that we are people too. We may look a little different, or do things differently, but the bottom line is, we are people, and that’s how we should be treated.”  
- Self-Advocate





## In the Community

Sports teams, social clubs, and faith communities are places we make friends and lifelong connections. These community spaces can be welcoming and inclusive for everyone.

### These questions can help you think of ways to make your recreational, social, or faith community more inclusive.

- Do people *with* and *without* disabilities participate in this activity together?
- Do you communicate information about your activity using simple, everyday language that is easy to understand?

- Is the location of your activity accessible? Are there accessible parking spaces, entrances, and washrooms?
- Are there accommodations or modifications available so everyone can participate in the activity?
- Do you ask people how you can best support them?
- Does everyone get to choose when and how they participate in the activity?
- Does your organization know how to meaningfully involve people with intellectual disabilities? Do you consider the needs of people with disabilities when planning your activity? [Listen, Include, Respect](#) can help!

**“For starters, make it easier for us to participate. Make some modifications to the building, if necessary, and to the activities. Allow [people with disabilities] the opportunity to participate.”**

**- Self-Advocate**

## — Next Steps

This document doesn't give you all the answers about building welcoming and inclusive communities. Instead, it **asks questions** and **invites you to think**. This is a skill we want you to keep practicing!

We hope you will **keep thinking about inclusion**. Including everyone starts with wanting to be inclusive. Every day, in every part of your life, ask yourself "who is included and who is left out"?

Then **do something** about it.

- Learn directly from people with an intellectual disability and their families. [People First of Canada](#) and their local chapters are a great resource. Don't expect every person with a disability to freely give their emotional energy and time to educate you. The next page has some great resources to get you started.
- Make changes in your own language and behaviour.
- Think about the [types of privilege](#) you experience in life. How can you use your power to create change?
- Ask people with an intellectual disability how you can better support them to participate. Don't make assumptions.

- Ask organizations, schools, and businesses how they include people with an intellectual disability.
- Choose to support businesses that show they are committed to inclusion.
- Talk about inclusion with your family and friends and explain why it matters to you.
- Look for opportunities to create new friendships with people with an intellectual disability.



## — Learn More

### Books

- [Life Landscapes](#) by People First of Saskatchewan

### Documentaries

- [The Freedom Tour](#)
- [Unloved: Huronia's Forgotten Child](#)

### For Kids

- **Book:** [Completely Emme](#) by Dr. Justine Green (Author), Ana Luísa Silva (Illustrator)
- **Book:** [My Friend Isabelle](#) by Eliza Woloson (Author), Bryan Gough (Illustrator)
- **Book:** [We Are All Different: A Celebration of Diversity!](#) by Tracey Turner (Author), Åsa Gilland (Illustrator)
- Sesame Street - [See Amazing in All Children](#)

### Podcasts

- [Invisible Institutions](#)

### Videos

- [I'm not your inspiration, thank you very much](#)
- [This is Ableism](#)

### Websites

- [Inclusive Education Canada](#)
- [Listen, Include, Respect](#)
- [People First Of Canada](#)
- [The Inclusive Workplace](#)
- [This is Ableism campaign](#)
- [Truths of Institutionalization: Past & Present](#)



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