



# **RESPECT & INCLUSION**

**GUIDE FOR INTERACTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

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**Respect & Inclusion: A Young Person's Guide to Interacting with People with Disabilities** is an e-book compiled by Team Prayaas, from information available online/offline and through interactions with various stakeholders. Prayaas is an initiative of the students of Jayshree Periwai International School, Jaipur and is aimed at spreading awareness about equal rights for Persons with Disabilities. I, as the founder of Prayaas, wish to thank our teachers for imbibing this spirit of inclusion in us. Through this e-book, our objective is to guide and inspire young students across the country, to think about “disability” in a new way that helps us learn to respect each other and appreciate our abilities together. I want to specifically thank Ms Uma Tuli, Padma Shri awardee, who gave me the opportunity to interact with the school students of Amar Jyoti Charitable at Delhi, way back in 2023. The school is an epitome of inclusivity where students with and without disabilities are admitted in almost equal numbers and given a barrier-free environment to flourish together. I also wish to thank Mr D R Mehta, Padma Bhushan awardee and founder of Jaipur Foot, for inspiring us to begin this initiative Prayaas, during his interaction at our school on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2024.

I hope that this e-book is found useful by the young students of India and that we grow up together in a truly inclusive world where we all have access to equal opportunities to pursue our dreams.

Arsh Choudhary

Founder, Prayaas (a school initiative)

## **Introduction: Why This Guide Matters**

We live in a beautifully diverse world where some people are tall while others are short, some speak many languages while others speak one, some learn quickly yet others need more time, some can walk without difficulty while others use wheelchairs or crutches, some people communicate using speech while others use sign language or communication devices. These are just some of the natural diversities of being human.

Disability is one kind of diversity which is unfortunately often misunderstood or ignored. People with disabilities are sometimes treated differently, excluded from everyday life, and even disrespected because of their disability. This behaviour needs to be changed.

This eBook is your practical guide to becoming an ally. It is designed for young people like you, high school and college students, who want to understand how to behave respectfully, confidently, and kindly toward people with disabilities. This guide will help you to:

- Use respectful and inclusive language
- Avoid common mistakes and misunderstandings
- Know how to offer help (and when not to!)
- Understand how to behave in everyday situations
- Challenge stereotypes and negative assumptions

You do not need to be an expert. All you need to be is open-minded, thoughtful, and willing to learn. Together, we can create schools, campuses, and communities where everyone feels welcome, valued, and safe.

## Chapter 1:

### What Is Disability? Understanding Identity and Respect

Disability is not just a medical issue or a health condition. It is also about the barriers that exist in society be it structural like buildings without ramps, digital like websites that are hard to use, or attitudinal like people's assumptions about what someone can or cannot do. According to the social model of disability, people are not disabled by their bodies or minds, rather they are disabled by a world that is not built for everyone.

Let us break this down with a few examples:

- **Seema uses a wheelchair**, but the real challenge is that her school does not have an elevator.
- **Jay has autism**, but what frustrates him most is when people expect eye contact and misunderstand him when he does not give it.
- **Ali is hard of hearing**, but the problem is not his hearing. It is when his teachers do not use captions or face him when they talk.

#### **Types of Disabilities:**

Disabilities can be of various types. Some may be visible to the eyes like seeing someone who uses a wheelchair or crutches, while others may be invisible like chronic pain, learning difficulties, or mental health conditions. They can affect a person's **Mobility** (walking, standing, moving), **Vision** (blindness or low vision), **Hearing** (deafness or hearing loss), **Speech** (clarity or ability to speak), **Cognition** (memory, attention, learning), **Neurodivergence** (autism, ADHD), **Mental health** (anxiety, depression). We must understand that everyone experiences their disability differently, and no two people are the same, even if they have the same diagnosis.

#### **Identity, Labels, and Language**

When talking about disability, language matters a lot. It is however, not always in black and white. Some people prefer identity-first language (e.g. "autistic person") because their disability is an important part of who they are. Others prefer person-first language (e.g. "person with autism") because they want to be seen as a person first. Some people with hearing impairments do not consider themselves disabled. They see themselves as part of a cultural and linguistic community. Some people with mental health conditions or chronic illnesses do not use the word "disabled" to describe themselves. Many people have multiple identities—someone can be disabled and neurodivergent at the same time

Therefore, identity is personal and labels can be empowering or uncomfortable, depending on how they are used. We must always prioritize respect, curiosity, and listening. We should observe carefully and follow their lead by using the terms people use to describe themselves. If you are not sure, just ask politely "What language do you prefer?"

There are some common myths surrounding disabilities. Let us try and bust them together:

✗ “Disabled people always need help.”

✓ Some do. Many do not. Always ask before helping.

✗ “If someone looks ‘normal,’ they’re not disabled.”

✓ Many disabilities are invisible.

✗ “It’s rude to talk about disability.”

✓ It is not rude if you are being respectful and listening. What is rude is making assumptions or jokes.

✗ “Disability is always sad.”

✓ People with disabilities can live joyful, successful, and meaningful lives—just like anyone else.

## Chapter 2:

### **Disability Etiquette – Everyday Respect in Action**

Disability etiquette simply means treating people with disabilities the same way you would want to be treated—with dignity, respect, and common courtesy. It is not about being overly careful or awkward. It is about being human. This chapter covers what to do (and what not to do) when meeting, interacting with, or offering support to someone with a disability whether they are your classmate, teammate, coworker, teacher, or someone you have just met.

#### **First Things First: Just Be Normal**

It sounds obvious, but this is key: treat people with disabilities like you would treat anyone else. You do not need to speak slowly (unless asked), raise your voice, or use a fake cheerful tone. Just smile, say hello, and talk the way you normally would. People with disabilities are people first. We must also avoid making it awkward. If you would not pat a non-disabled person on the head, do not do it to someone in a wheelchair. If you would not talk to someone's friend instead of them, do not do it to someone who uses a sign language interpreter.

#### **General Do's and Don'ts**

##### **DO:**

- Speak directly to the person, not their aide, support worker, or interpreter.
- Ask before offering help. (“Would you like a hand?” is better than jumping in.)
- Use respectful language—avoid outdated or negative terms (see Chapter 1).
- Be patient. Some people need more time to respond, move, or speak.
- Include people with disabilities in conversations, plans, and decisions.
- Respect personal space—this includes mobility aids like canes, crutches, and wheelchairs.
- Listen to how people describe themselves, and respect their choices.
- Apologize and correct yourself if you make a mistake—it's okay!

##### **DON'T:**

- Don't speak extra loudly or slowly, unless asked.
- Don't grab, touch, or move someone's wheelchair, cane, or guide dog without permission.
- Don't assume someone needs help—they may prefer to do it themselves.
- Don't ask intrusive questions (like “What happened to you?”).
- Don't make jokes about disabilities—even if you think it's harmless.
- Don't assume someone cannot do something based on how they look.

Let us imagine this real-life situation where you see someone using a white cane trying to find their way to the cafeteria. You are not sure if they need help. What do you think is the right move? Walk up calmly and say, “Hi, would you like help finding the cafeteria?”. Do not grab their arm or guide them without asking. Hence, we must remember that asking first

shows respect. Acting without permission, even with good intentions, can be uncomfortable or even dangerous for them.

It is important to note that different people communicate in different ways. Some use speech, some sign, some use devices, and some write or type. The following tips may help while communicating with persons with different types of disabilities:

- ❖ If someone has a speech impairment, we must give them time to speak and not be in a rush to finish their sentences. If you don't understand, we can say so kindly. ("Sorry, can you say that again?"). You can even offer paper, phone notes, or gestures if needed.
- ❖ If someone uses sign language, then we must remember to speak directly to them, not their interpreter. We must maintain eye contact and speak clearly. If you do not know sign language, you can gesture, write, or type.
- ❖ If someone uses a communication device (like a speech-generating tablet), we should wait patiently while they type or use it. We should not talk over them, rather learn to show respect to their method of communication.
- ❖ If you make a mistake or if you say the wrong thing or use outdated language, it is okay to say "Sorry—I didn't mean to say it like that. Thanks for letting me know." If someone corrects you, do not get defensive. Instead, you must thank them and learn from it.

The most important part in interacting with persons with disabilities is to be consistent. Being respectful once is easy. Being inclusive every day is what creates real change. In group projects, on public transport, at a concert, in class, we must remember to include everyone. Small changes make a big difference, for example, choosing accessible meeting spots, sharing materials in multiple formats (e.g. printed, audio visual, digital, etc.), keeping paths clear of bags or furniture, speaking up if someone is being left out or disrespected.



## Chapter 3:

### **Supporting Specific Needs – Practical Tips for Everyday Inclusion**

People with disabilities are not a monolith and we must appreciate that different people have different needs. The best way to support someone depends on who they are, not just what kind of disability they have. This chapter offers simple, respectful tips for interacting with people across a variety of disability types. It's not about memorising rules—it's about learning to pay attention, ask when you're unsure, and treat people as equals.

1. **People with mobility disabilities-** This includes people who use wheelchairs, crutches or walkers, braces or prosthetics, have limited strength, stamina, or balance. While helping these people, never forget to ask before helping. Do not push someone's wheelchair or grab their arm unless invited. Remember to never lean on a wheelchair as it is part of someone's personal space. If a conversation is lasting more than a few minutes, sit or kneel to be at eye level. Keep doorways and paths clear of bags or chairs. Also, do not assume they need or want help just because they move differently. Avoid saying "You're so inspiring" just for doing everyday things as it can come off as patronising. Also avoid asking questions like "What happened to you?" as it is intrusive unless they choose to share.
2. **People who are blind or have low vision:** Not everyone who is blind is totally without sight as some people have partial vision or light perception. When interacting with such people, always introduce yourself by name when you start a conversation. Remember to say when you are leaving or entering a space so that they are not left guessing. If offering help, say something like: "Would you like my arm?" Let them take *your* arm, not the other way around. Try to be descriptive like saying "the door is to your left" instead of "over there." Offer digital documents in screen reader-friendly formats (like accessible PDFs or Word docs). Avoid grabbing their cane or guide dog. Do not start speaking louder as it does not help and may seem condescending. Also avoid petting a guide dog—when it's working, it's not a pet.
3. **People who are deaf or hard of hearing:** Communication needs vary widely as some people use sign language, others read lips, use hearing aids, or prefer texting. While communicating with such persons, always remember to face the person when talking and make sure your mouth is visible (do not cover it) as they might be lip-reading. If you are in a group, make sure only one person speaks at a time. If someone uses an interpreter, talk to the person, not the interpreter. Try using visual cues (pointing, gestures, or writing) when needed or speech-to-text apps or phone notes if it helps communication. Avoid shouting as it distorts your mouth and makes lip-reading harder. Avoid saying "Never mind" if they ask you to repeat as it can appear to be dismissive.
4. **People with intellectual or learning disabilities:** This includes people with Down syndrome, Dyslexia, ADHD, and other conditions that affect understanding, memory, or learning. While interacting with them, try using plain, clear language but do not talk down to them. Learn to be patient and to give them time to process and respond. Break things into steps when giving instructions or information and make sure to check for understanding in a friendly way: "Did that make sense?" or "Want me to go over that

again?” Avoid talking like they are a child and try to use age-appropriate tone. Do not start getting frustrated if they need things repeated. Remember not to make assumptions about intelligence.

**5. People with autism or neurodivergent conditions:** Neurodivergence includes Autism, ADHD, Tourette’s, and more. People may process information differently, communicate in unique ways, or prefer routines and quiet spaces. While interacting with them, respect communication styles—some people may use fewer facial expressions or gestures. Try to give advance notice of changes to plans or routines when possible and provide calm spaces when environments are too loud or overwhelming. Be clear and direct in your dialogue while avoiding sarcasm or overly vague expressions. Allow people to stim (e.g., flap hands, fidget, pace)—it helps regulate emotions. Avoid forcing eye contact as it can be uncomfortable or distracting. Do not assume that someone is being “rude” if they do not speak the way you expect and do not pressurize someone to behave “normally” as neurodiversity is not something to fix.

**6. People with invisible disabilities:** Some disabilities—like chronic pain, epilepsy, diabetes, or mental health conditions—are not visible, but still affect daily life. While communicating with these people, you have to believe someone when they say they have a disability, even if you cannot see it. Avoid judgement if someone needs a break, medication, or accommodations and learn to offer flexible options like extra time, quiet environments, or places to sit. Avoid saying things like “But you don’t look disabled!” or assuming someone is lazy, rude, or exaggerating.

In addition to the above, there might be situations in which you are dealing with People with Multiple Disabilities as some people may experience more than one type of disability. For example, someone could be deaf and use a wheelchair, or be autistic and have a visual impairment. The most important thing is to ask what works best for them. Everyone’s needs and preferences are unique.

## Chapter 4:

### What to Say (and What Not to Say)

We all want to be kind and respectful, but sometimes we are afraid of saying the wrong thing. Many times we have all thought “Can I say ‘disabled’? Should I say ‘special needs’? What if I mess up?” This chapter is here to help you feel more confident talking about disability. The good news is: if you speak from a place of respect and curiosity—not pity or fear—you are already on the right track.

Let us look at real examples of what to say (and what to avoid), and *why* it matters.

#### **1. Say “person with a disability”**

Different people can have different preferences. You can say “Samira is a person with a disability.” These are respectful, clear terms. Some people prefer *identity-first language* (e.g. “autistic person”) while others prefer *person-first* (e.g. “person with autism”). If you are not sure, do not hesitate to ask! You must learn to avoid using words like “Handicapped”, “Special needs”, “Differently abled” (it may sound patronising)

#### **2. Say “uses a wheelchair” instead of “wheelchair-bound”**

You can say “He uses a wheelchair to get around.” or “She’s a wheelchair user.” Saying someone is “*bound*” to a wheelchair sounds like they are trapped. But a wheelchair is a tool for freedom and mobility. Avoid using terms like “Confined to a wheelchair” or “Crippled” (offensive and outdated)

#### **3. Say “non-disabled” instead of “normal”**

You can say “This space is for both disabled and non-disabled people.” or “She’s non-disabled.” Saying “normal” implies disabled people are *abnormal*, which is hurtful. Just say what you mean—non-disabled is clear and respectful. You must avoid using terms like “Normal kids” or “Regular people”.

#### **4. Be careful with compliments**

You might mean well, but some “compliments” can be hurtful or patronising such as “You’re so brave for going out!” or “You’re such an inspiration!” Doing everyday things like going to school, shopping, or playing sport does not automatically make someone “inspiring.” Praise people for things they actually *do* and not just for existing with a disability. Instead, say something like “That was a great speech.” or “You worked hard on that project—nice job.”

#### **5. Ask before asking personal questions**

It is okay to be curious but remember that someone’s medical history is not public info. Avoid using sentences like “What’s wrong with you?” or “How did you end up in that chair?” or “What’s your condition?”. These questions can feel invasive. If someone chooses to share, it is great! But it’s their choice and must not be forced to share details. Instead start with

friendship: “Hi! I’m Mohit. Want to join us?” and let people open up if and when they are ready.

## **6. Avoid words that treat disability like a joke or insult**

Some words have made their way into casual slang, but they hurt. Avoid using words like “That’s so lame.” or “Stop acting psycho.” or “Are you blind or something?” or “Ugh, I’m so OCD.” Using disability-related terms as insults or jokes spreads harmful ideas. You can express yourself without putting others down. Instead try to use more accurate words: “That’s confusing.” “I’m feeling anxious.” “This is frustrating.”

## **7. Use inclusive phrases in everyday speech**

There are some words and sentences that we should try using in common parlance like “Everyone is welcome.” or “Let’s make this event accessible to all.” or “Do you need anything to take part comfortably?”. Small changes show people they are seen, valued, and included.

If you still mess up... don’t panic. We all make mistakes sometimes. What matters most is how you respond. If you say the wrong thing, apologise briefly: “Sorry—I didn’t mean to be disrespectful.” or correct yourself: “I meant ‘person who uses a wheelchair.’”. Move on without making it awkward as people appreciate honesty and effort more than perfection. That’s the heart of inclusive language.

## Chapter 5:

### **Creating Inclusive Spaces – Designing Environments Where Everyone Belongs**

Creating inclusive spaces is not just about ramps and signs. It is about attitude, awareness, and action. Whether you are setting up a classroom, planning a community event, or designing a workplace, the goal is to make sure that everyone, regardless of ability, can participate, learn, and thrive. Let us explore how to make spaces more inclusive, both physically and socially.

#### **1. Universal Design: Accessibility for All**

Universal Design means creating environments that are usable by everyone, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. It is about designing spaces that are flexible, accessible, and welcoming. The key principles for this are:

- **Equitable Use:** Design spaces that are useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
- **Flexibility in Use:** Accommodate a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
- **Simple and Intuitive Use:** Make spaces easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or concentration level.
- **Perceptible Information:** Communicate necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.
- **Tolerance for Error:** Minimize hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
- **Low Physical Effort:** Design spaces that can be used efficiently and comfortably with a minimum of fatigue.
- **Size and Space for Approach and Use:** Provide appropriate size and space for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.

#### **2. Inclusive Classrooms: Learning for Everyone**

An inclusive classroom is one where all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, feel valued and have equal opportunities to learn. By implementing these strategies, educators can create a classroom environment that supports the diverse needs of all students. The strategies for inclusivity are:

- **Flexible Seating:** Offer a variety of seating options—standing desks, floor cushions, or adjustable chairs—to accommodate different needs and preferences.
- **Clear Pathways:** Arrange furniture to ensure easy movement and accessibility for students with mobility aids.
- **Assistive Technology:** Incorporate tools such as speech-to-text software, screen readers, or audio books to support diverse learning styles.
- **Sensory-Friendly Spaces:** Create quiet corners or sensory rooms where students can take breaks when feeling overwhelmed.
- **Collaborative Learning:** Encourage group work and peer support to foster a sense of community and belonging.

### 3. Accessible Public Spaces: Welcoming the Community

Public spaces should be designed to be accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities. These design elements help create public spaces that are welcoming and usable for everyone. The following design considerations should be kept in mind:

- **Ramps and Elevators:** Ensure that all areas are accessible via ramps or elevators for individuals with mobility challenges.
- **Tactile Paving:** Use textured ground surfaces to assist individuals with visual impairments in navigating spaces safely.
- **Clear Signage:** Provide signs with large, high-contrast text and symbols to aid navigation.
- **Accessible Restrooms:** Design restrooms with features like grab bars and sufficient space for manoeuvring.
- **Quiet Zones:** Designate areas with reduced noise and sensory stimulation for individuals who may become overwhelmed.

### 4. Inclusive Workplaces: Embracing Diversity

An inclusive workplace values and supports the diverse abilities of its employees. By adopting these practices, employers can create a workplace where all employees feel valued and supported. The key practices for inclusion are:

- **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Offer options like remote work or flexible hours to accommodate different needs.
- **Inclusive Hiring Practices:** Ensure job descriptions and interview processes are accessible to all candidates.
- **Employee Resource Groups:** Create groups where employees can connect and support each other.
- **Training and Awareness:** Provide regular training on diversity, equity, and inclusion to foster a respectful workplace culture.

### 5. Inclusive Events: Celebrating Diversity

Events should be designed to be accessible and enjoyable for everyone. Some tips for organising inclusive events are:

- **Accessible Venues:** Choose locations that are wheelchair accessible and have appropriate facilities.
- **Sign Language Interpreters:** Provide interpreters for events to ensure communication access.
- **Dietary Considerations:** Offer a variety of food options to accommodate different dietary needs.
- **Quiet Areas:** Designate spaces where individuals can take breaks if they feel overwhelmed.
- **Clear Communication:** Provide event information in multiple formats (e.g., large print, digital, audio) to ensure accessibility.

## Chapter 6:

### **Encouraging Independence and Self-Advocacy**

One of the most powerful ways to support individuals with disabilities is by encouraging independence and empowering them to advocate for themselves. Self-advocacy refers to the ability to speak up for one's own rights, needs, and desires. Encouraging self-advocacy and fostering independence is essential for building self-confidence, resilience, and a sense of control over one's life. In this chapter, we will explore ways young people can help individuals with disabilities become more independent and confident in advocating for themselves.

#### **1. Understanding Independence**

Independence means being able to perform daily activities and make decisions without relying excessively on others. For many individuals with disabilities, achieving independence is an ongoing process that involves both gaining skills and building confidence. Supporting independence does not mean doing everything for the person, but rather providing the right tools and encouragement to help them succeed on their own.

#### **2. The Role of Encouragement and Patience**

Encouraging independence begins with providing support that helps individuals build confidence in their abilities. Here's how young people can foster a supportive environment for independence:

- **Allow for mistakes:** No one becomes independent without facing challenges. Allow individuals to make mistakes and learn from them. Mistakes are an essential part of the learning process and can provide valuable lessons.
- **Encourage small steps:** Start by encouraging small, manageable tasks that the person can successfully complete on their own. Over time, these small steps will build to larger ones.
- **Provide positive reinforcement:** Praise the person's efforts and progress. Even if they are not yet fully independent in a task, acknowledging their determination and efforts can boost their confidence.

#### **3. Teaching Practical Skills**

Independence often requires learning and mastering practical skills. As a young person, you can support someone with disabilities by helping them acquire these skills. Some skills that are important for independence include:

- **Daily living skills:** These include tasks like cooking, cleaning, managing personal hygiene, and budgeting. These skills help individuals take care of themselves and their surroundings, promoting independence.
- **Time management:** Learning how to manage time and meet deadlines is crucial for independence. Encourage the person to create schedules or use reminders to help them stay on track.

#### 4. Encouraging Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is the ability to speak up for oneself and assert one's needs, rights, and desires. For individuals with disabilities, learning how to self-advocate is empowering. Here's how you can encourage self-advocacy:

- **Help them identify their needs:** Encourage the individual to reflect on their own needs and what kind of support they may require in various situations. Help them recognize what accommodations or modifications might be helpful in their environment.
- **Teach them how to communicate their needs:** Sometimes, individuals with disabilities may not know how to express their needs clearly. Encourage them to practice expressing their needs confidently, whether in writing or verbally. Reassure them that it's okay to ask for help when needed.
- **Role-play situations:** One great way to teach self-advocacy is through role-playing. You can simulate different scenarios where the person might need to ask for help, make a request, or speak up for themselves. This practice helps build communication skills and confidence.

#### 5. Providing Tools and Resources

To foster independence, it is important to provide tools and resources that can support the individual's growth. These tools may include:

- **Assistive technology:** Tools like speech recognition software, reading devices, and communication apps can support individuals with disabilities in becoming more independent. Encourage them to explore available technology that can make daily tasks easier and more accessible.
- **Support networks:** While independence is important, it is also helpful for individuals to have a reliable support network when necessary. This might include family members, friends, mentors, or professionals who can offer guidance and help when needed.
- **Advocacy groups:** Help the individual connect with advocacy groups and organizations that support people with disabilities. These groups can provide resources, support, and opportunities for individuals to learn about their rights and how to advocate for themselves.

#### 6. Teaching Problem-Solving and Decision-Making

Independence and self-advocacy are closely tied to problem-solving and decision-making skills. Teaching someone with a disability how to make decisions can help them feel more in control of their life. Here's how you can foster these skills:

- **Encourage critical thinking:** Help the individual learn how to think through decisions, considering the pros and cons of different choices. Discuss possible outcomes and guide them to make the best decision.
- **Empower them to make choices:** Allow individuals to make their own choices, whether it is what they want for lunch or what activities they would like to participate in. Giving them the freedom to choose fosters a sense of responsibility and self-determination.
- **Use real-life scenarios:** Present them with real-life situations where they can practice problem-solving. For example, if they face a scheduling conflict, help them weigh options and decide the best course of action.



## 7. Celebrate Achievements and Progress

Independence is a journey, not a destination. Every step forward, no matter how small, is an accomplishment worth celebrating. Here's how you can acknowledge progress:

- **Celebrate milestones:** Whether it's completing a task independently or successfully advocating for themselves, celebrate these achievements. Recognition of progress helps build confidence and encourages further growth.
- **Reinforce positive behaviour:** When an individual takes initiative or advocates for themselves, reinforce these actions with positive feedback. Acknowledge their efforts and let them know how proud you are of their growth.

## Chapter 7:

### **Advocating for Disability Rights in India and Creating an Inclusive Community**

Creating an inclusive community is essential for fostering acceptance, understanding, and equal opportunities for people with disabilities. An inclusive community is one where everyone, regardless of ability, feels welcomed, valued, and supported. As young people, you have the power to play an instrumental role in creating such communities, both in your immediate surroundings and in society at large.

The movement for disability rights in India is integral to creating a just, inclusive society. While significant progress has been made over the years, people with disabilities continue to face challenges in various aspects of life, from accessibility to education and employment. As young people, you hold the power to be active participants in advocating for disability rights and promoting a more inclusive society for all.

Advocating for disability rights is not just about legislation or legal protections; it's also about challenging societal attitudes, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring equal opportunities for people with disabilities. In this chapter, we will explore how you can advocate for disability rights in India, why your voice matters, and the steps you can take to make a positive difference.

#### **1. Why Disability Rights Matter in India**

In India, people with disabilities are often excluded from opportunities and social participation. Historically, individuals with disabilities have faced discrimination, stigma and many have been denied access to basic rights like education, employment, and healthcare. In a country as diverse as India, it is crucial that disability rights are a part of the broader conversation about social justice and equality.

The fight for disability rights in India is about ensuring that all people, regardless of their abilities, have equal access to opportunities, dignity, and respect. Disability rights in India focus on:

- **Accessibility:** Ensuring public spaces, transportation, and infrastructure are accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Education:** Advocating for inclusive education policies that cater to the needs of students with disabilities.
- **Employment:** Supporting initiatives that ensure people with disabilities have access to employment opportunities and reasonable accommodations.
- **Healthcare:** Ensuring that people with disabilities have access to adequate and affordable healthcare services.
- **Social Inclusion:** Promoting the social inclusion of people with disabilities in all areas of life.

As young people, you can help raise awareness, challenge discrimination, and support policies that promote disability rights and inclusion.

## 2. Recognizing Ableism and Challenging Negative Attitudes in India

Ableism—discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities—is pervasive in India, often in subtle ways. From inaccessible buildings to social stigma, ableism affects many aspects of daily life. Challenging ableism is essential for creating an inclusive society.

To address ableism in India, consider the following:

- **Language and Attitudes:** The way people talk about disability can reinforce negative stereotypes. In India, terms like "handicapped," "crippled," or "differently-abled" are often used without awareness of their impact. It's essential to use respectful, inclusive language like "person with a disability" (PwD) and not assume that disabilities define a person's capabilities.
- **Breaking Stereotypes:** Media in India often portrays people with disabilities in limiting, often tragic ways. While awareness campaigns have helped shift perceptions, there is still much work to be done in portraying people with disabilities as active, independent individuals with diverse experiences and aspirations.
- **Challenging Discrimination:** If you witness discrimination against people with disabilities, whether in your school, community, or workplace, stand up for their rights. It's important to speak out against ableism, educate others, and challenge the misconceptions that contribute to marginalization.

## 3. Understanding India's Disability Laws and Policies

India has made significant strides in recognizing the rights of people with disabilities through legislation. Familiarizing yourself with these laws can empower you as an advocate for change. Here are some key laws and policies:

- **The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016:** This comprehensive legislation replaced the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights, and Full Participation) Act, 1995. The RPWD Act, 2016 provides for the equality and protection of rights of people with disabilities and ensures equal access to education, employment, and healthcare. It also mandates accessibility in public spaces and transport.
- **The National Policy for Persons with Disabilities, 2006:** This policy outlines the framework for inclusion, equity, and equality for people with disabilities. It focuses on the education, employment, and social integration of people with disabilities.
- **The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017:** This act focuses on the rights of individuals with mental illnesses, ensuring access to mental healthcare, protection from discrimination, and rights to rehabilitation.

By being aware of these laws, you can advocate for their implementation and enforcement, ensuring that the rights of people with disabilities are upheld across the country.

## 4. Becoming an Ally: Supporting Disability Rights in India

Being an ally in India means actively supporting people with disabilities and working toward systemic change. It's about recognizing the barriers that exist in society and advocating for their removal. Here's how you can support disability rights:

- **Support inclusive education:** Advocate for inclusive education systems where children with disabilities are not isolated but integrated into general classrooms. This ensures that they receive quality education alongside their peers.

- **Promote accessible infrastructure:** Accessibility is a major challenge in India. Public transportation, buildings, and public spaces often lack the necessary infrastructure to accommodate people with disabilities. Advocate for more accessible infrastructure in your community, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible toilets.
- **Support inclusive employment practices:** Many people with disabilities in India face significant barriers to employment. Advocate for inclusive hiring practices in your community, schools, and workplaces. Support policies that encourage workplace accommodations and equal employment opportunities for all.
- **Volunteer for disability rights organizations:** Many NGOs in India are dedicated to advancing the rights of people with disabilities. Volunteer with such organizations to lend your time and support.

## 5. The Role of Technology in Disability Rights in India

In India, technology can play a transformative role in improving the lives of people with disabilities. Innovations in assistive technology—such as screen readers, prosthetics, mobility devices, and speech recognition software—can break down barriers to education, employment, and social participation.

Here is how you can support the use of technology for disability rights:

- **Advocate for digital accessibility:** Many websites and digital platforms in India are not designed with accessibility in mind. Advocate for accessible digital content, including websites, apps, and government services, to ensure people with disabilities can participate fully in digital society.
- **Promote assistive technology:** Support the development and distribution of assistive technologies that help people with disabilities in their daily lives. Raise awareness about the availability of tools like hearing aids, screen readers, and adaptive devices for those with mobility impairments.
- **Raise awareness of digital literacy:** Many people with disabilities in India face barriers to accessing technology and the internet. Promoting digital literacy programs specifically designed for people with disabilities can help bridge this gap.

## Conclusion

### **Empowering the Next Generation of Disability Rights Advocates**

India has made great progress in recognizing the rights of people with disabilities, but much work remains to be done. Young people like you have a vital role to play in creating an inclusive, accessible, and just society for all. By standing up for disability rights, challenging ableism, and supporting policy change, you can contribute to building a better future for people with disabilities.

Your advocacy, no matter how small, makes a difference. By creating a culture of inclusivity, equality, and respect, you help pave the way for a more just society where everyone—regardless of ability—is able to live their life to the fullest.

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