



# Project Inclusion | Projet sur l'inclusion

Educator modules on disability,  
accessibility, and inclusion

## Module 1 Record

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A teaching hospital fully affiliated with the University of Toronto.

**Holland Bloorview**  
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

# Module 1 Record: The importance of accessibility, inclusion, and participation for students with disabilities

## Learning outcomes

1. Articulate the benefits of inclusion and accessibility.
2. Understand the goals of the AODA, OHRC, and The Charter of Rights and Freedoms in light of students with disabilities.
3. Explore how parents may experience the purpose and outcomes of meetings like Identification, Placement, and Review Committees (IPRCs).
4. Apply one or more of the strategies in this module in your class and school.

## Key Message 1: Why inclusion is important for all students.

### *Definitions in the context of disability*

#### **Inclusion**

Taking action to welcome and involve people with disabilities in everyday activities, and ensuring they have ways to participate that accommodate their needs.

[Dear everybody, it's time to end stigma for young Canadians with disability](#)

#### **Inclusive education**

Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

[Equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools: Guidelines for policy development and implementation](#)

#### **Intersectionality**

The Ontario Human Rights Commission, in its Policy on accessible education for students with disabilities, states the following: Discrimination may be unique or distinct when it occurs based on two or more Code grounds. Such discrimination is said to be “intersectional.”

The concept of intersectional discrimination recognizes that people’s lives involve multiple interrelated identities, and that marginalization and exclusion based on Code grounds may exist because of how these identities intersect.

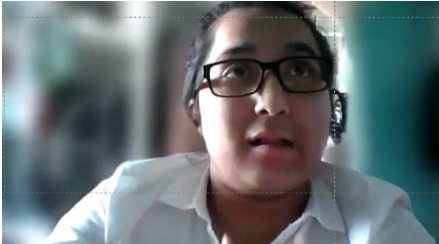
Discrimination based on a disability could intersect with discrimination based on other Code grounds, including:

- race, colour, or ethnic background
- creed
- ancestry (including Indigenous ancestry)
- citizenship (including refugee or permanent resident status)
- gender identity and gender expression
- sex (including pregnancy)
- family status
- marital status (including people with a same-sex partner)
- another type of disability, including mental, learning, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities
- sexual orientation

- age
- receipt of public assistance (in housing)
- record of offences (in employment).

[Accessible education for students with disabilities, pp. 5–6](#)

### Lived experience: Alexandra

Lived experience: Alexandra	Comments:
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### Practical strategies: Teaching students about disability

1. Noting that we are all different, and that difference is valuable and part of being human.
2. Asking students about times they have felt different and reflecting on those experiences.
3. Collaboratively listing ways to work or play together and encourage connections.
4. Modelling respectful language and the need to seek permission when asking people questions about their disability. Remind students that not everyone is comfortable answering questions like this.
5. Asking students to identify barriers (e.g., stairs, videos without captions), how those barriers affect people with disabilities and solutions to those barriers.
6. Discussing how diversity also encompasses physical, emotional, and intellectual diversity and that the same respect we hold for other ways of being diverse holds true for students with disabilities.
7. Outlining the legal rights of all students to a full education free of discrimination.

### Reflection/Discussion

Consider your education environment and how inclusion and accessibility are promoted in this space. What else can you do to increase inclusion and accessibility?

How can you help students and the larger community to appreciate that all students have the right to access education without discrimination?

Write your comments below:

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## Key message 2: Reframing how we look at disability.

### Lived experience: Cristina

Lived experience:	Comments:
Cristina	
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### Non-evident disability

Regardless of whether a disability is evident or non-evident, a great deal of discrimination faced by people with disabilities is underpinned by social constructs of “normality,” which in turn tend to reinforce obstacles to integration rather than encourage ways to ensure full participation. Because these disabilities are not “seen,” many of them are not well understood in society. This can lead to behaviour based on misinformation and ignorance.

[Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate, 2.3, Non-evident disabilities](#)

### Ableism and social model of disability

#### Ableism

Prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination directed against people who have developmental, emotional, physical, sensory, or health-related disabilities. Ableism may be evident in organizational and institutional structures, policies, procedures, and programs, as well as in the attitudes and behaviours of an individual.

[Equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools: Guidelines for policy development and implementation](#)

Ableism may be defined as a belief system, analogous to racism, sexism, or ageism, that sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent value than others. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious, and may be embedded in institutions, systems, or the broader culture of a society. It can limit the

opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduce their inclusion in the life of their communities.

[A framework for the law as it affects persons with disabilities](#)

### Social model of disability

Disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

[Convention on the rights of people with disabilities](#)

Looking at disability as a social issue, shaped not by a person's medical condition, but rather by the attitudinal and environmental barriers that prevent people with disabilities from living a full life.

[Dear everybody, it's time to end stigma for young Canadians with disabilities](#)

### Lived experience: Deborah and Mark

**Lived experience:**  
Deborah and Mark



**Comments:**

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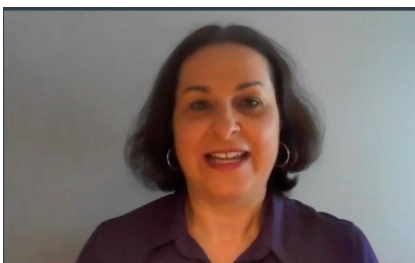
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### Lived experience: Monika

**Lived experience:**  
Monika



**Comments:**

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## Stigma

The shame or inferior status that people consciously or unconsciously put on people they perceive as different. Disability-related stigma can come from negative attitudes towards disability that are based on outdated and incorrect assumptions.

[Dear everybody, it's time to end stigma for young Canadians with disabilities](#)

### Common misconceptions

*Students with disabilities need people without disabilities to make decisions, advocate, and speak for them.*

Students with disabilities are the experts in their own lives. Our role is to support and accommodate them.

*Accommodations are favours and not a right.*

It is the human right of students with disabilities to be equally included in the education system—accommodations are the tools and supports students need to access the curriculum and their education.

### Combating stigma

1. Recognize that people with disabilities are experts in their own lives and can make decisions, speak, and advocate for themselves.
2. Treat students in age-appropriate ways that work for them.
3. Encourage students with disabilities to take supported, safe risks, providing assistance only when needed.
4. Ensure that all parents understand that an accommodation made for a student with a disability is not an unfair advantage.

### People-first language

Consider using	Instead of
They have a disability/students with disabilities	Disabled student/students/the disabled/handicapped/crippled/deformed
He has a cognitive disability	He is mentally disabled/retarded
They have Down syndrome	They're Down's
She has a mental health condition/	She is mentally ill/disturbed



mental illness	
They use a wheelchair/mobility device/communication device	They are confined to a wheelchair/ is wheelchair-bound/ can't speak
She has a developmental delay/physical and developmental disability	She is developmentally delayed
Students without disabilities/typically developing students	Normal students

### **Identity-first language**

In some cases, a student may prefer to use identity-first language, finding it empowering to be part of a community with a voice. Here are two examples:

He is autistic	He has autism
They are deaf	They have a hearing disability

General practice is to lead with people-first language, but always ask a person how they would like to be addressed and then ensure their choice is shared with the class and the larger school environment.

### **Applying your learning: Creating belonging classrooms**

1. Listen to and actively seek input from students with disabilities in goal setting and decision making.
2. Adapt group activities (e.g., field trips, sports) so all students can participate in the same activity and use their strengths to contribute to the activity's success.
3. Help students learn how to communicate with others about their disability.
4. Help students with disabilities advocate for their needs and goals when they choose.
5. Plan physical spaces and desk arrangements to accommodate supportive equipment and different learning needs.
6. Consider using accommodations like visual schedules for the entire class, instead of exclusively for students with disabilities.
7. Employ inclusive design when creating learning experiences so that all students, including those with disability, can enter and engage with the learning.

### **Reflection/Discussion**

Content in this section centres on language — including the definitions of ableism, the social model of disability, stigma, and people- and identity-first language.

Think about ways that you can use this language in your classroom and encourage your students to do the same.

Write your comments below:

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## Key message 3: Legislation: What it means for classrooms and schools.

### Lived experience: Marc and Melody

Lived experience: Marc and Melody	Comments:
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### Legislation

There are several pieces of legislation that protect the rights of all people. We will explore some of the main points that relate to education.

- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC)
- Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (“The Charter”)

### AODA

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requirements include:

- Students must be provided with educational resources in accessible formats, in accordance with individual needs.
- People with disabilities must have access to program information and student records in accessible formats, in accordance with individual needs.
- Institutions must provide educators with accessibility training.
- People with disabilities must have equal opportunity to benefit from goods, services, and facilities.

\*In 2021, two committees were struck to recommend what an education standard should include; one committee focusing on barriers at the kindergarten to grade 12 level; the other focusing on barriers at the university and college level. These committees will recommend how education standards could remove identified barriers. At this time, educational institutions must follow AODA requirements listed above.

[AODA requirements for educational institutions](#)

## OHRC

The Ontario Human Rights Commission has updated its policy document, *Accessible education for students with disabilities* (2018). In its introduction (pp. 5–6), they highlight the following as some of the new and emerging issues in relation to disability and education:

- The impact of ableism on the delivery of education and on the experiences of students with disabilities
- The evolving legal definition of disability, and its implications for education providers
- The duty of education providers, in certain circumstances, to inquire into whether a student has needs related to a disability, and to offer assistance and accommodation, even if the student has not made a specific accommodation request
- The type of medical/healthcare information that can be requested by education providers and should be provided by students to support an accommodation request

[Accessible education for students with disabilities. 2018, pp. 5–6](#)

## Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

15. (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

[Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 15](#)

## Summary of legislation

### Consider these questions:

In what ways does your classroom already reflect the requirements of the Charter, the AODA, and/or the OHRC?

After learning more about your legislative responsibilities, is there anything you want to change about your classroom.

## Reflection/Discussion

Content in this section focuses on some of the legislation that is in place to protect the rights of all people, including educators, students, and caregivers with disabilities.

Ministry and district documents also reflect these rights for students and parents. Consider your district documents. What further rights are included that your school reflects?

Write your comments below:

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## Key message 4: Partnering with parents to achieve outcomes for students.

### *Collaborating with parents of students with disabilities*

- Developing a holistic view of a student
- Creating a safe space
- Understanding that parents of students with disabilities may have different needs

### *Lived experience: Nerissa*

Lived experience: Nerissa	Comments:
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Nerissa’s video touched on some issues of IEPs. For some parents, IEP and IPRC meetings can be stressful. Consider these aspects in relation to parents’ involvement in school meetings.

- What knowledge is assumed on the part of educators? on the part of parents?
- The use of acronyms and terms specific to education.
- The need for collaboration as students’ needs evolve.
- The degree to which the meetings increase parents’ understanding of support within the education system and with related healthcare partners.
- The importance of clarity around the roles and outcomes associated with school-based meetings.

### *Apply your learning: Developing a holistic view of a child*

#### **Strategies: Empathy interview sample questions**

1. What helps you learn?
2. Can you tell me about your best day at school?
3. What makes you want to come to school?
4. What can I do to help you in class?

## Creating safe places

### Safe spaces can:

- Encourage parents to communicate with educators.
- Help educators who may have little experience with disabilities to share their thoughts with parents, acknowledging they are learning as well.
- Create opportunities to solve problems before they become more serious.
- Minimize anxieties that may come from questioning the educational system.
- Help to familiarize parents with education support for students with disabilities, particularly those parents who are new to the country and/or those who are facing initial diagnoses of their child.

### Reflection/Discussion

Developing a holistic view of a student is beneficial not only to that student but also to you as an educator.

To do this takes time in a day that is already busy. Consider some ways that could provide the time and space you need to develop a holistic view of a student you have questions about.

Write your comments below:

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### Conclusion

Meaningful inclusion takes time and thought. This module is intended to give you some starting ideas, but you may want to find additional or specific types of information to best support the inclusion of your students.

You are not alone in this; many organizations also want to support inclusion and the success of students with disabilities. You can look for more information from your district, Ministry of Education, local children's hospitals, and national disability organizations.

### Conclusion: Key messages

1. Why inclusion is important for all students.
2. Reframing how we look at disability.
3. Legislation: What it means for classrooms and schools.
4. Partnering with parents to achieve outcomes for students.

### **Reflection/Discussion**

Think of an experience you have had that brought one or more of the conditions illustrated in this module to life, for example, engaging with parents in a way that greatly benefitted a student. What enabled that to happen? What difference did it make?

What is a small action you can take that will make a big difference to students with disabilities and their parents?

Write your comments below:

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Thank you for engaging in this learning. We would like to know about your experience with the module. Please take 5 minutes to do a short survey.

<https://redcap.link/projectinclusion>

## **Credits**

### **Lived experience contributors**

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Jillian Ferguson, Physiotherapist, ErinoakKids Centre for Treatment and Development  
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Semantha da Silva, Principal, Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board  
Stacey Copland, Ontario College of Teachers  
Sue Ball, Member, Council for Exceptional Children  
Tilia Cruz, Support Services Advisor, Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario

## Module 1 Links and Resources

### Links

Links are listed in the order in which they appear in the key messages. Where appropriate, we have included links to other resources mentioned in the module.

<b>KM 1</b>	<a href="#"><u>Dear everybody, it's time to end stigma for young Canadians with disabilities</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools: Guidelines for policy development and implementation</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Accessible education for students with disabilities</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 15</u></a>
<b>KM 2</b>	<a href="#"><u>Policy and guidelines on disability and the duty to accommodate, 2.3, Non-evident disabilities</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Equity and inclusive education in Ontario schools: Guidelines for policy development and implementation</u></a> <a href="#"><u>A framework for the law as it affects persons with disabilities</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Convention on the rights of people with disabilities</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Dear everybody, it's time to end stigma for young Canadians with disabilities</u></a>
<b>KM 3</b>	<a href="#"><u>AODA requirements for educational institutions</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Accessible education for students with disabilities</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Section 15</u></a>
<b>KM 4</b>	<a href="#"><u>Empathy interviews</u></a>

## Resources

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Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital. (n.d.). *6 ways to be an ally to kids and youth with disabilities*. <https://www.projectinclusion.ca/learn/tips-and-tools/be-an-ally-to-kids-youth-with-disabilities/>

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Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (n.d.).

*Conventions on the rights of persons with disabilities.*

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/conventionrightspersonswithdisabilities.aspx>