



Together
We Bloom

8 Disability-Affirming Strategies for Caregivers



Ableism is not one person's fault, but it's ALL of our responsibility. It is not enough to just teach our kids to "be nice." We must actively be anti-ableist in our caregiving in order to shift structures that exclude disabled people. These strategies below are for ALL caregivers, whether you have a disabled child or not, who are raising kids committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

1. Normalize Differences Early & Often

- **Talk about differences on purpose:** Point out diverse ways brains and bodies work in everyday moments.
 - *"You're lining up the blocks, and your brother is building a tower. Cool how your brains came up with different ways to play!"*
- **Disability is not a bad word;** name disabilities and neurodiversity in your world
 - *"Our neighbor is using sign language to communicate. She is Deaf. That means she does not hear so she uses her hands to communicate."*



2. Embrace Questions and Curiosity —Don't Shut Them Down

- Replace "Don't stare" with **curiosity and facts:**
 - *"That's her wheelchair! Some people use wheelchairs to move around; others use their legs. How do you move around?"*
- **Answer questions** about a child's own disability with honesty (in an age-appropriate manner) through a lens of the social model of disability
 - *"That person told you to sit down because some people think that you need to sit still to listen. But we know that's not true, they made a mistake! Your brain is Autistic and you need to move to listen. Everybody can listen in the way that is best for their brain and body."*

3. Audit Representation in Your Books & Media



- **Seek out stories** where disabled/neurodivergent characters are main characters, not sidekicks or lessons.
- Avoid "Inspiration porn" (e.g., "So brave for living with disability!"). **Focus on joy, agency, and ordinary life.**
- Check out booklists with **disability representation.**

4. Language Matters



- **Break the stigma**, say "disability" and "disabled"
 - NOT "differently abled" or "special needs." (All kids have the same needs, their needs aren't "special")
- **Drop ableist phrases:** "That's crazy!" → "That's unfair!"

5. Disrupt Ableist Norms

- **Check your bias:** Are you praising only neurotypical/non-disabled behavior? (e.g., "Good job sitting still!" might ignore neurodivergent needs)
- **Get curious:** What are implicit messages you send your kids that reinforce that there is one type of brain and one type of body that is to be praised or included?
- **Learn more:** If you need help figuring out what your biases are (hint: this is all of us), see #7



6. Make Your Community More Inclusive

- Notice **who is being left out** of playdates, school events, celebrations, sports teams, etc. and **speak up** so all are included
 - *"I noticed that this event will be in a loud gym which might be overwhelming for some ND kids, I want to make sure that we sensory quiet space so all can participate"*
- **Normalize** asking about accommodations to ensure all have access your community or event
 - *"When you RSVP, please let us know if you or your child need any accommodations to participate so we can provide them for you"*
- **Prioritize accessibility as a right, not a privilege**

7. Intentionally Seek Diverse Spaces

- Think about your friend groups and community, do you and your family spend time with **people who look, think, act differently from you**, including disabled and neurodivergent people?
- If you're not in diverse spaces, **ask yourself why** that might be.

8. Learn From Disabled Voices



- **Listen to your disabled friends** and neighbors, but don't ask for their emotional labor to explain ableism to you
- **Follow disabled advocates** on social media
- **Read books** by disabled authors
- **Find ideas** for further learning at www.togetherwebloom.org/resources