

# Disability Advocacy and Awareness

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People with disabilities are our nation's largest minority group. They are also the most inclusive and the most diverse. Everyone is represented—all genders, all ages, all religions, all socioeconomic levels, and all ethnic backgrounds.

People with disabilities are, first and foremost, people who have individual abilities, interests, and needs. They are moms, dads, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, friends, neighbors, coworkers, students, and teachers. The disability community is the only minority group that anyone can join at any time. About 54 million Americans—one out of every five individuals—have a disability. Their contributions enrich our communities and society as they live, work, and share their lives.

Everyone enjoys being independent. People who have disabilities are no different. People gain independence in many ways: through more thoughtful building design, with assistive devices, and with help from family, friends, and healthcare professionals.

The United States has laws about disability services that make sure everyone has access to buildings, services, and activities. Laws define safe access to buildings and public spaces. The U. S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, or OSHA, is the federal agency responsible for these regulations. Architects and builders follow OSHA standards when they build or remodel



## PLAN YOUR PROJECT

Use this idea starter AND publication 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide* as the starting place for your 4-H self-determined project. The *Self-Determined Project Guide* is available from your county OSU Extension office or on the Web at [ohio4h.org/selfdetermined](http://ohio4h.org/selfdetermined). You may choose to do a little or a lot depending on your level of interest. Be sure to register your project with your county OSU Extension office.

homes and businesses. Many of the practices they put in place are designed to protect people from injury. When safety is combined with disability practices, more people can safely access buildings and activities.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) are laws meant to give access, maintain, protect, and hold organizations and businesses accountable for keeping their facilities and communications free from barriers.

**Universal design (UD)** is part of a worldwide movement that supports people living with a wide array of disabilities, age-related limitations, and chronic health conditions. UD is the creation of products and environments meant to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without need for adaptation or specialization. The primary focus of UD is the development of user-friendly products. Many homes, offices, and public buildings have been changed in ways that enable access to all persons. This re-design of an environment can range from small gadgets to complete transformations.

Universal design is based on seven principles. These principles can be used to evaluate existing environments or products, to serve as guidelines in developing new environments or products, and to educate consumers and design professionals.

### **Principle 1: Equitable Use**

The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.

### **Principle 2: Flexibility in Use**

The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

### **Principle 3: Simple and Intuitive Use**

The design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

### **Principle 4: Perceptible Information**

The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions of the user's sensory abilities.

### **Principle 5: Tolerance for Error**

The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

### **Principle 6: Low Physical Effort**

The design can be used efficiently and comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue.

### **Principle 7: Size and Space for Approach and Use**

Appropriate size and space are provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of the user's body size, posture, or mobility.

**Assistive Technology (AT)** refers to devices and ways that make life easier. For example, if someone has a broken leg, they might use crutches. Crutches are an AT tool. If someone has arthritis, using an electric can opener instead of a handheld one prevents joint pain. AT includes everyday tools that can be found in stores, on the internet, and from medical professionals. Other examples include toothpaste-tube squeezing devices, long-handled bath sponges, clothing with hook and loop fasteners (like Velcro®), and slip-on shoes. AT also includes specialized and customized equipment, such as high-tech, special-purpose computers and tablets, screen readers for those with vision impairments, and basically any device that makes life easier. Hundreds, if not thousands, of AT devices and strategies are available. Many types of AT are used by people with disabilities every day.

**Person First Language (PFL)** is a respectful way to refer to someone with a disability. Using this language, a person is recognized first for who they are, not by their physical characteristics.

Were you ever called a name because of your height, the color of your hair, or another characteristic over which you have no control? Having big ears, for example, does not mean a person should be called "Big Ears." In the same way, people should not be labeled by their disabilities. Doing so is a disrespectful approach that ignores other, more meaningful characteristics.

When referring to a person with a disability, refer to the person first. Let's say you have a new friend in school. He is from Kansas and uses a wheelchair. Introduce him to others as your friend from Kansas,

not by calling out his disability. If you feel a need to describe why Joe uses a wheelchair, you can explain that he has, for example, a spinal cord injury. Avoid using descriptions like “he is a paraplegic.”

Not all disabilities are visible and easy to recognize. When in doubt, use the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. In other words, treat others as you would like to be treated. Instead of saying, for example, “he’s autistic,” say, “he has autism.” He is not his diagnosis; he is a person who has medical condition. The People First Respectful Language Modernization Act of 2006 was enacted to help make this distinction. This language shows

respect for those with disabilities by referring to them as people with disabilities instead of as people who are disabled. Just as important is to avoid referring to others without a disability as normal, healthy, or able-bodied. Here are examples of how to use PFL.

To learn more about People First Language (also called Person First Language), watch this video from the Texas Center for Disability Studies: [youtu.be/lz40q5lydnQ](https://youtu.be/lz40q5lydnQ).

People First Language	Language to Avoid
Person with a disability	The disabled, handicapped
Person without a disability	Normal person, healthy person
Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability	Retarded, slow, simple, moronic, defective or retarded, afflicted, special person
Person with an emotional or behavioral disability, person with a mental health or a psychiatric disability	Insane, crazy, psycho, maniac, nuts
Person who is hard of hearing	Hearing impaired, suffers a hearing loss
Person who is deaf	Deaf and dumb, mute
Person who is blind/visually impaired	The blind
Person who has a communication disorder, is unable to speak, or uses a device to speak	Mute, dumb
Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound
Person with a physical disability	Crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, spastic
Person with epilepsy or seizure disorder	Epileptic
Person with multiple sclerosis	Afflicted by MS
Person with cerebral palsy	CP victim
Accessible parking or bathroom	Handicapped parking or bathroom
Person of short stature	Midwget
Person with Down syndrome	Mongoloid
Person who is successful, productive	Has overcome his/her disability, is courageous

**Source:** Based on “People First Language: Think about How You Speak,” by Ariana Bulatovich. February 19, 2017. Odyssey. [Blog.] [theodysseyonline.com/people-first-language-first](http://theodysseyonline.com/people-first-language-first).

Regardless of someone's impairment, do not treat them like a child. Do not use patronizing gestures such as patting someone on the back or head. These habits communicate you do not think the person with a disability is capable of understanding you. Also, when you meet someone with a limitation who is accompanied by a parent, a paraprofessional, or an aide, be sure to talk to the person, not to their companion.

Unless the person you are interacting with asks you to modify your typical speech, it is not necessary to talk louder, lean toward them, or speak slower. Just as you may not like someone stepping into your personal space, do not lean on wheelchairs or other assistive devices. Do not play with or take away crutches or other devices that someone relies on. Always ask a person if they would like assistance with a task. Most people with disabilities know their abilities and being independent is a vital part of their life.

Language is very powerful. Using inclusive language is one of the most significant and effective ways to promote inclusivity.

Be patient when working with people with disabilities. Always let them speak and work at their own pace, without urging them to talk, think, or move faster. It can be tempting to speed along a conversation or to finish the sentences of someone with a disability but doing so can be disrespectful. If you do not understand something someone says because they are speaking too slowly or too quickly, do not be afraid to ask questions. It is okay if there are long pauses in conversation.

## AREAS OF INTEREST AND THINGS TO DO

Every self-determined 4-H project can be broken down into areas of interest. These are the specific things members want to address during their project adventures. Using 4-H 365 *Self-Determined Project Guide*, identify at least three areas of interest with at least three activities per area to explore. Take your ideas from the following list or make up your own.

### Person First—Required

- Design a poster that represents how People First Language is used. Display it somewhere others will see it—at school, at the Extension office, in a store window, and so forth.
- Create a meme depicting how People First Language is used. Post the meme on social media and use the alt-text feature so everyone can access it.
- Interview someone with a limitation or disability. Prepare a presentation on their work, hobbies, and family life. If you need help meeting someone, check if there is an AgrAbility project in your state at [agrability.org](http://agrability.org). Someone there may be able to introduce you to a farmer client. You can also contact advocacy groups, county board of developmental disabilities, and veterans' organizations. Share what you learn with your club or group, or your project helper.
- Do a presentation on People First Language. If you can, show this video from the Texas Center for Disability Studies: [youtu.be/lz40q5lydnQ](https://youtu.be/lz40q5lydnQ). To see how much knowledge your audience members gain, ask them to rate their knowledge before and after your presentation. You can use the questionnaire at [ohio4h.org/selfdetermined](http://ohio4h.org/selfdetermined) by printing copies ahead of time. Was your presentation effective? Share results with your project helper.
  - If you include images in your presentation, be sure to describe them in case anyone in your audience has a visual disability. This also helps audience members understand why you included an image.
  - Use closed captioning and audio descriptions of images in videos to make sure your presentation is accessible to those with hearing and vision impairments.
- Interview a caregiver of someone with limitations. Possibilities include people who work at long-term care facilities and day centers, family caregivers, occupational therapists, and physical therapists. Find out why they enjoy their work, who they assist, and the rewards and challenges of working with people with disabilities. Discover if there is an opportunity to assist the caregiver by volunteering to help with a project. Share your experience with your project helper.

## Safety

- Using the appropriate sections of the Community Survey Checklist available at [ohio4h.org/selfdetermined](http://ohio4h.org/selfdetermined), conduct a review in your community to show how safety and disability services work together. Walk around your town and look for sidewalks that have wheelchair slopes and curb cuts, pedestrian walk signs that also have audible signals, buildings with disability accessible entrances, and signs pointing to the accessible entrances. Do steps have handrails? If improvements are needed, share your checklist with someone who might be able to help.
- Complete the Greenhouse Activity at [ohio4h.org/selfdetermined](http://ohio4h.org/selfdetermined) to see how slips, trips, and falls can be identified in public businesses. Think of other places you visit, like livestock barns at fairgrounds and public swimming pools. Do slip hazards exist in those places too? How can safety improvements be made? Share your findings with your project helper.
- Maintain a nature trail for a local park while keeping people with disabilities in mind. Check with your state's Department of Natural Resources, the National Park System, or your community public/metro park system and ask about being a volunteer to maintain walking trails. Take a picture or video of the improvements you make before and after your work. This is a great project for your 4-H club or group.
- Learn more about universal design (UD) and how you can add UD features around your home. For help getting started, go to [fcs.osu.edu/programs/healthy-relationships/universal-design](http://fcs.osu.edu/programs/healthy-relationships/universal-design). Share what you learned with your project helper.
- Build a fence-line feeder for sheep or goats so workers, including anyone with a disability, do not have to enter the pen or corral. Instructions from Premier Supplies are here: [premier1supplies.com/img/instruction/127.pdf](http://premier1supplies.com/img/instruction/127.pdf). You can order the kit or gather the materials on your own.

## Service and Advocacy

- Make a list of resources and organizations that support people with disabilities in your area. Make and share a poster, brochure, or social media post to raise awareness.
- Research disability laws, especially the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Learn the definition of a

disability, and who is considered a person with a disability. A great place to start is [ada.gov/cguide.htm](http://ada.gov/cguide.htm). Create a timeline of important events. Share what you learn with your project helper.



- Create and share a poster, video, or presentation that gives an overview of disability laws. Include how the laws impact people, services, businesses, and transportation in your community. If you create a video or presentation, use closed captioning and audio descriptions of images and videos to make sure your presentation is accessible to those with hearing and vision impairments.
- Create and share a poster around the saying, “My ability is stronger than my disability” or something similar.
- Explore ways you and your 4-H club or group can work to raise disability awareness and advocacy in your community.
- Look around your community to see if stores, libraries, public government offices, and businesses that serve the public are accessible. Review the ADA guide for small towns at [archive.ada.gov/smtown.htm](http://archive.ada.gov/smtown.htm) and determine if certain historic buildings should be accessible. If they are not accessible and are old enough they cannot be made accessible, are there ways to otherwise serve individuals with disabilities? Prepare a report and present your findings to your 4-H club or group and to a local government official.
- Identify a farmer or gardener in your community who has a disability or may have limitations on their mobility and endurance and offer to help clean, organize, or repair items and areas around their property. This is an excellent project for your 4-H club or group.

- Contact your county Board of Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities and ask about volunteer opportunities for individuals and groups. Coordinate a day of service for your 4-H club or group—host a party, help with a field trip, or teach audience members a craft or skill. More ideas for activities are at [learningtogive.org](http://learningtogive.org).

### Wellness and Lifestyle

- Explore a sport that has been modified to accommodate people with disabilities. Examples are cycling, hunting, fishing, snow skiing, water skiing, surfing, and many more. A good resource is the International Paralympic Committee at [paralympic.org](http://paralympic.org). Make a list of athletes who impressed you and share their stories with your project helper.
- Gaming is a great way to stay connected with friends and family. Investigate gaming devices that are accessible, such as those controlled by switches, voice, feet, and toes. Share what you find with others interested in gaming. The AbleGamers Charity has information at [ablegamers.freshdesk.com](http://ablegamers.freshdesk.com).
- Volunteer to help with Special Olympics. Opportunities range from assistant coach to office work to simply being a fan cheering on the athletes from the stands. You can locate a Special Olympics program in your state/area at [specialolympics.org](http://specialolympics.org).
- Explore how to make it easier for a person with a disability to tend a garden. Consider providing an elevated, raised bed garden for a community garden or for a gardener who has trouble bending and kneeling. Ask a local lumber or home improvement store to donate lumber and supplies. Find instructions online or use this one: Oregon State University ([extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pub/fs-270-raised-bed-gardening](http://extension.oregonstate.edu/catalog/pub/fs-270-raised-bed-gardening)). Share your plans with your project helper.
- Make a strawberry garden with PVC pipe for drip irrigation for someone who has trouble bending or kneeling. Directions are at Fab Art DIY here: [fabartdiy.com/diy-verticle-pvc-pipe-strawberry-planter-tower](http://fabartdiy.com/diy-verticle-pvc-pipe-strawberry-planter-tower). Take photos of the completed project and share with your club or group.

- Build accessible enclosures and feeding/watering systems for backyard poultry or rabbits for someone in your community whose disability might make it hard for them to care for their animals. Take photos of your completed project and share them.
- Change a piece of clothing to make it more accessible for someone with limited mobility. For example, back pockets on a pair of jeans are not usable for someone who cannot reach them. Check out this website for inspiration: [alterurego.co](http://alterurego.co). Take photos of the alterations you make and share with your club or group members..



*Photo: Cassie Ramon, Kansas AgrAbility*

Vertical strawberry garden for anyone who has difficulty bending or kneeling.

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## RELATED RESOURCES

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A Planning Guide for Making Temporary Events Accessible to People with Disabilities, [adata.org/publication/temporary-events-guide](https://adata.org/publication/temporary-events-guide)

ADA Publications and Videos, [adata.org/ada-fact-sheet-page](https://adata.org/ada-fact-sheet-page)

Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), [adata.org/factsheet/ADA-overview](https://adata.org/factsheet/ADA-overview)

Architectural Barriers Act (1968), [access-board.gov/about/law/aba.html](https://access-board.gov/about/law/aba.html)

Extending Universal Design Principles onto the Farmstead, [ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/AEX-983.1-10](https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/AEX-983.1-10)

Gardening with a Physical Limitation, [ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/AEX-983.3](https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/AEX-983.3)

How Many People in the United States Have a Disability? [adata.org/faq/how-many-people-united-states-have-disability](https://adata.org/faq/how-many-people-united-states-have-disability)

Maine AgrAbility Yoga Stretches for Farmers poster, [extension.umaine.edu/agrability/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/07/YogaForFarmersPoster\\_Web.pdf](https://extension.umaine.edu/agrability/wp-content/uploads/sites/15/2020/07/YogaForFarmersPoster_Web.pdf)

National AgrAbility, [agrability.org](https://agrability.org)

National Association of the Deaf, [nad.org](https://nad.org)

National Federation of the Blind, [nfb.org](https://nfb.org)

Ohio AgrAbility Caregiver Support Network, [agrability.osu.edu/caregiver-support-network](https://agrability.osu.edu/caregiver-support-network)

Ohio AgrAbility Fitness for Farm Life video series, [agrability.osu.edu/resources/fitness-farm-life](https://agrability.osu.edu/resources/fitness-farm-life)

Ohio AgrAbility in Action: Ohio AgrAbility Makes a Difference with ASM Club, [agsafety.osu.edu/newsletter/ag-safety-stat/november-2018/ohio-agrability/ohio-agrability-action-ohio-agrability-makes](https://agsafety.osu.edu/newsletter/ag-safety-stat/november-2018/ohio-agrability/ohio-agrability-action-ohio-agrability-makes)

People First Language, [tcdd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/People-First-Language.pdf](https://tcdd.texas.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/People-First-Language.pdf)

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, [ada.gov/cguide.htm](https://ada.gov/cguide.htm)

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, [hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr/civilrights/resources/factsheets/504.pdf](https://hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr/civilrights/resources/factsheets/504.pdf)

Understanding Disability Statistics Fact Sheet, [adata.org/factsheet/understanding-disability-statistics](https://adata.org/factsheet/understanding-disability-statistics)

United State Disability Statistics, [disabilitystatistics.org](https://disabilitystatistics.org)

Universal Design Resources and Videos, Family and Consumer Sciences, Ohio State University Extension, [fcs.osu.edu/programs/healthy-relationships/universal-design/resources-and-videos](https://fcs.osu.edu/programs/healthy-relationships/universal-design/resources-and-videos)

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