

Leave Your Ableism  
at the Door

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# Presenters



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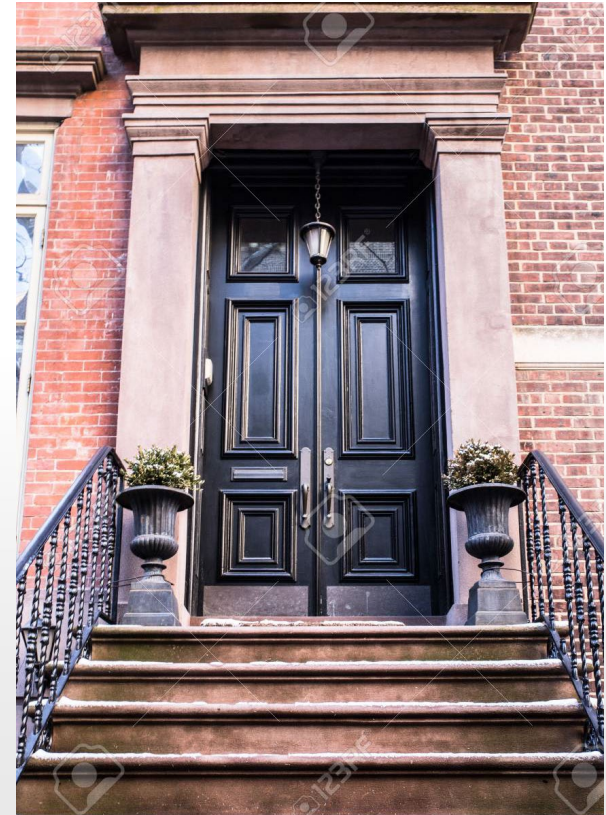
Why offer a  
session on  
Ableism at the  
Alliance  
Summit?

# Ableism Definitions

- **Ableism:** discrimination and oppression of disabled people; societal belief that being abled is “normal” and is preferred.
- **Ableism:** A system of oppression that favors being able-bodied/able-minded at any cost, frequently at the expense of people with disabilities. (via Stacey Milbern “Ableism is the Bane of My Motherf-in’ Existence”)
- **Ableism a·ble·ism \ 'ābə- li-zəm \ noun:** “A system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence and excellence. These constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence and excellence are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable or worthy based on people's appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily produce, excel & “behave.” Importantly, you do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.” -a working definition by Talila “TL” Lewis
- **Internalized Ableism:** beliefs that being able-bodied/able-minded is preferable, either weaponized toward yourself or toward other disabled people; modifying, shaming, or policing your own behaviors and actions to appear more “abled.” Shame or lack of self-esteem due to one’s disabled status.

# Structural Ableism

- Physical barriers (lack of ramps, elevators, push buttons, etc.)
- Design barriers
  - difficult for people with mobility aids to navigate
  - doorknobs that are hard to open
  - doors that are too heavy to push open
  - elevators that are hidden and difficult to find





# Cultural Ableism

- Lack of authentic representation of disabled people in media:
  - Villain or predator
  - “super crip”
  - Focus on desire to be cured
  - Storylines around disability center all conflict on disability and/or “overcoming” disability.
- Forced segregation of disabled people
- Treating disabled people as angelic, innocent, or childlike



# Medical Ableism

- Institutionalization
- Push for cure at any cost
- Not including disabled people, input, or perspectives in treatment and services





## Financial and Legal Ableism

- Employment rate & pay per hour
- Accessible housing
- Precarity of ADA, ACA, Disability & Social Security
- Imposition of legal guardianship on disabled people








# Ableist Microaggressions/Insults

- Lame
- Crazy
- Idiot
- Moron
- Imbecile
- Spaz
- Fool
- The awful “R” word



# More Ableist Microaggressions


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- “Oh you’re depressed? you should really try yoga”
  - “You wouldn’t believe the number of people at the airport who could get out of their wheelchair when it was time to board!”
  - “Are you off your meds?”
  - “My ideas fell on deaf ears.”
  - “I’m super OCD about how I clean my apartment.”
  - “Can I pray for you?”
  - “I don’t even think of you as disabled.”
  - “Now he’s in heaven where he can walk.”



# Euphemisms Beware

- The euphemism treadmill
- Just #SayTheWord
- What are some of the euphemisms we use?





# Identity-First Language vs. Person-First Language

- Person-First language emphasizes personhood, distancing the person from the disability
- Identity-First language emphasizes the role a disability has in shaping a person's identity and is preferred by many disability advocates
- Ask a person what they prefer
- NEVER EVER EVER correct a disabled person for using Identity-First language!



# Everyday Ableism in IDD Service Organizations

- Lack of authentic representation throughout leadership
- Tendency to center voices of families and guardians over people with disabilities
- Employment programs directed at connecting people to menial unskilled jobs
- Segregated programs and settings
- Overuse and misuse of rights modifications

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# Everyday Ableism in IDD Service Organizations

- Reflection of power dynamics and ableism in the terms that we use:
  - Placements
  - Clients
  - Individuals
  - Self-advocates
  - “Wheelchairs”



# Let's Talk About Sex...

Adults with disabilities are (by definition) adults, and have every right to:

- Have Sex
- Curse
- Drink alcohol
- Watch R rated movies





In the past five years, over 700 people with disabilities have been murdered by their parents, relatives or caregivers.

In the media, courts, and public opinion, sympathy is overwhelmingly for the perpetrators!

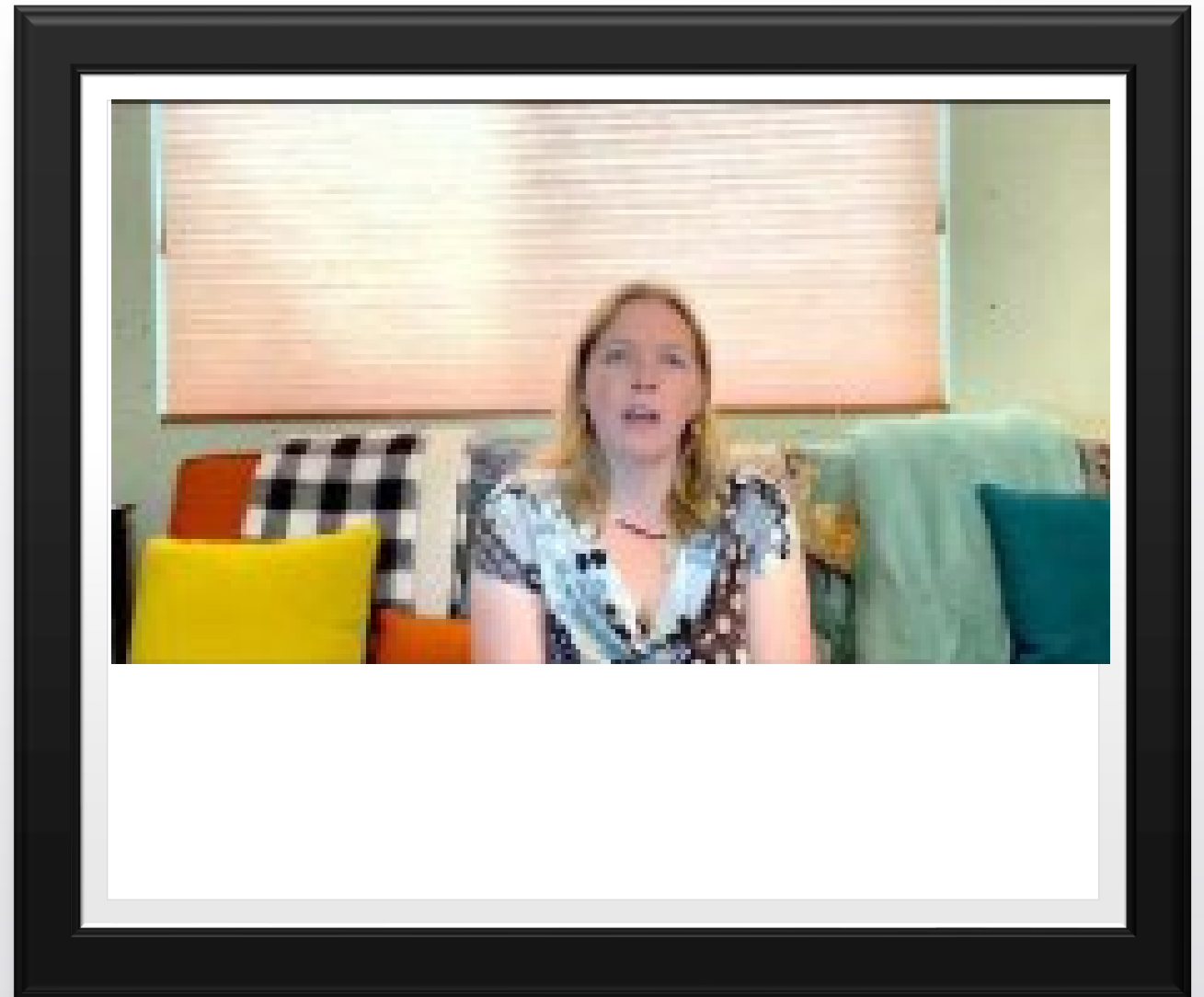




# What Not to Do

- The “R” bomb
- Assuming someone needs help (ask—don’t assume!)
- Treating disabled adults like children
- Giving family too much power over the person with disability
- Don’t judge a book by its cover
- Not providing the accommodations needed
- Don’t be judgmental

<https://youtu.be/xfAOAPUZapQ>

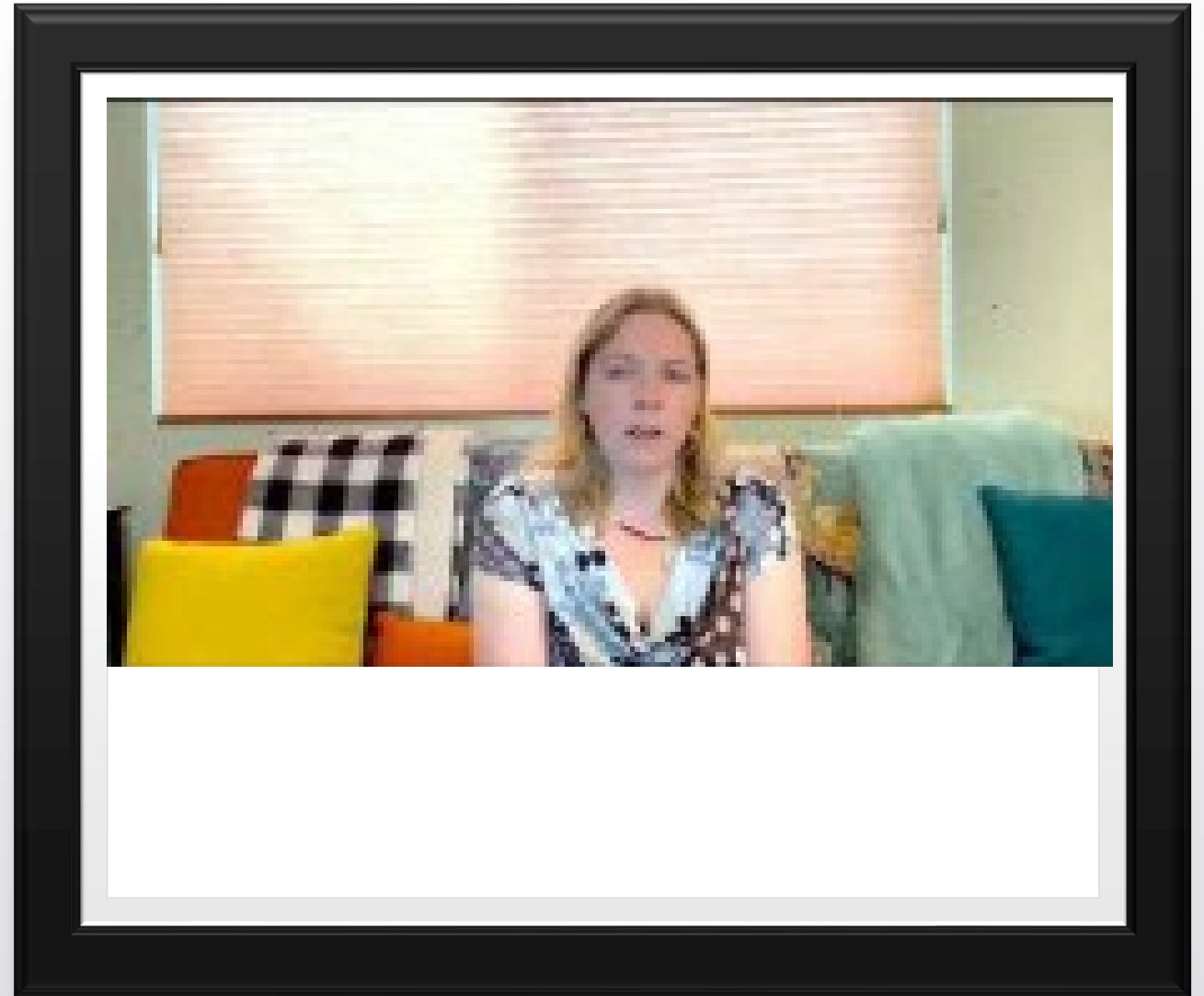




# What To Do

- Be patient and understanding
- Address the person with disability and not family members or others supporting them
- Support and empower self-advocacy
- Hire people with disabilities!!
- Give credit where it's due
- Ask before you help someone

<https://youtu.be/zUdf7OzkObM>





## Plus One More “Don’t” and Some “Dos”

Don’t be defensive if someone  
challenges your ableism!

Do:

- Be curious
- Express gratitude
- Commit to change



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## Call to Action

How has ableism reared its head  
in your life or your  
organization?





## Call to Action

What will you do  
differently next week  
when you return to  
the office?



Thank you for challenging your assumptions!



As you go to your next session, please leave your  
ableism at the door...



# Contact Me!

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