

The background of the slide is a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping, textured brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, pink, and blue. A prominent white line forms a large, stylized loop or infinity symbol in the upper left quadrant. The overall aesthetic is modern and artistic.

Disability, Accessibility and Ableism in the Workplace

Background: Tori Nefflen

Tori has been active in disability justice and advocacy work since 2020. She's lived with acute ADHD her entire life and is a cancer survivor with chronic health complications as a result of her transplant, giving her insight on multiple dimensions of disability. Today she is a patient advocate on both the state and local level and routinely fights for accessibility across MD.



What is disability?

Having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. This includes people who have a record of such an impairment, even if they do not currently have a disability. It also includes individuals who do not have a disability but are regarded as having a disability.

Examples Include:

- Visual impairments or blindness
- Auditory impairments or deafness
- People with learning or intellectual disabilities
- People with a physical disability
- People with chronic health conditions
- People with neurological differences
- People with mental health conditions



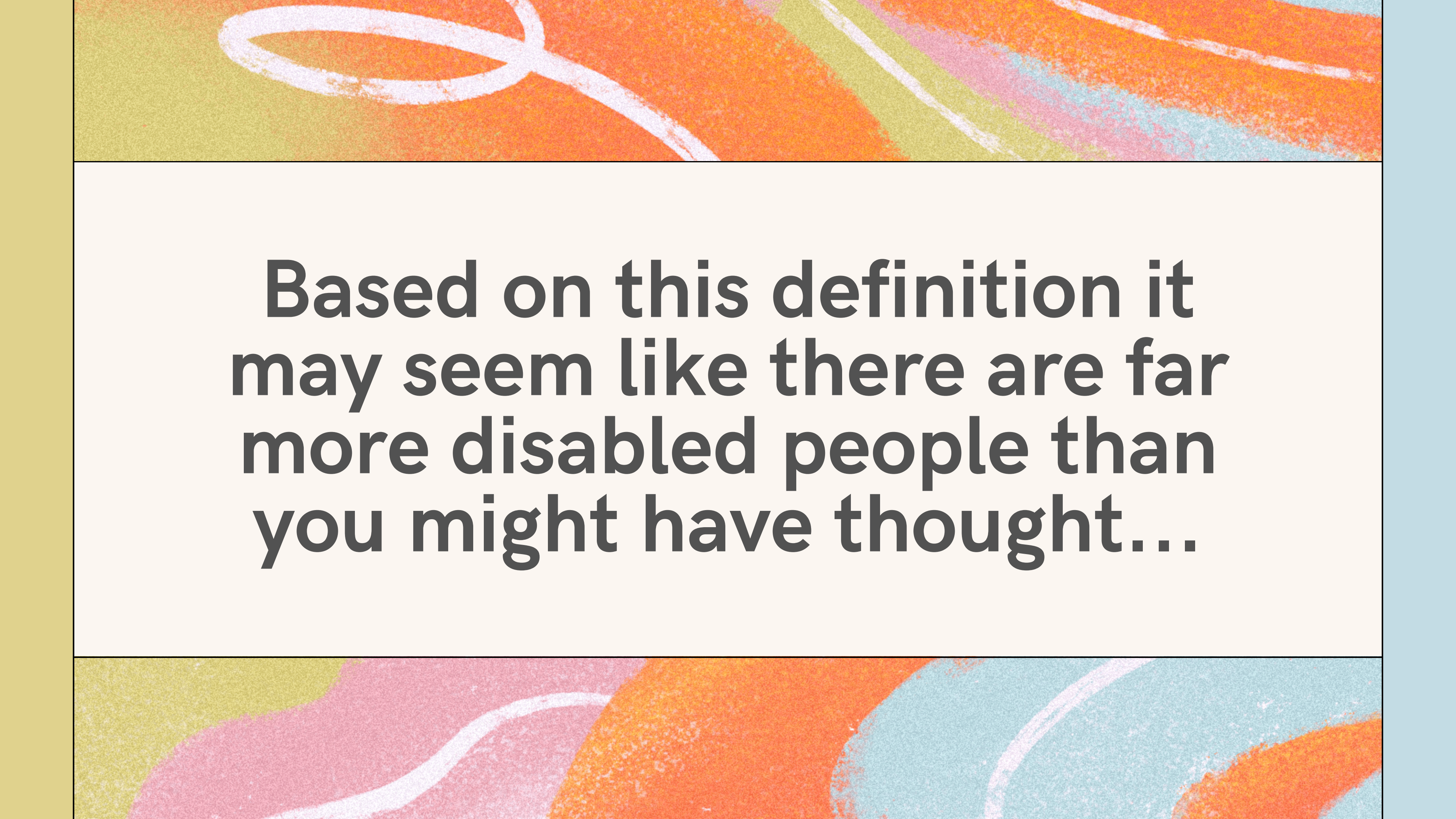
The 2 Models of Disability

Medical

- Disability is a consequence of a disease, health condition or trauma
- The inherent problem is with the disabled person and the goal is to return them to "normal"
- This is how most people tend to view disability

Social

- Disability is one element of a person's identity
- People are made "disabled" by their environment, not their bodies
- The solution is to fix society and institutions, not human beings
- This is a more inclusive view

The background of the slide is a vibrant, abstract composition of overlapping, textured brushstrokes in shades of orange, green, pink, and blue. A prominent white line starts in the top left, loops around, and extends towards the center. Another white line curves across the bottom right. The overall effect is dynamic and artistic.

**Based on this definition it
may seem like there are far
more disabled people than
you might have thought...**



26%

Of all Americans have one or more disabilities

- This makes disabled people one of the largest minorities in the country
- Many people may not even realize they have a disability (ex: people with glasses, people with anxiety, etc)
- However, discussions about ability, disability and accessibility are often left out of discussions on inclusion, leading to ongoing ableism across society and in the workplace

Sources: Triangle, Inc.

What is Ableism?

Ableism is the intentional or unintentional discrimination or oppression of individuals with disabilities.

- Many of us are ableist without ever realizing it because we live in a passively ableist society, it doesn't make us bad it makes us human
- Many cultural beliefs such as hyper productivity, physical fitness, punctuality, and being healthy are rooted in ableism
- Ableism, like racism, sexism, antisemitism, etc. does not have to be overt to cause harm



Examples of ableism in the workplace

Belittling someone for their inability to lift large and bulky items or to do physical labor fast enough - you never know whose suffering from a physical disability or chronic health condition

Viewing coworkers that take off large amounts of time for mental health or medical reasons as uncommitted and denying them promotions as a result

Using ableist language, whether knowingly or not, to insult other coworkers, or make negative comments such as calling others R-worded, "Autistic", "Bipolar", etc.

Making unwanted comments or asking coworkers to explain the use of their aids or tools to you, such as asking why someone is wearing a mask or why someone has to take a medication

Why does it matter?

Ableism has been used throughout centuries to marginalize disabled people. During the eugenics movement of the 1800's this type of rhetoric and thinking led to the mass institutionalization, sterilization, and murder of disabled persons.

Today 76% of all employees with disabilities hide their conditions in the workplace for fear of discrimination. But in workplaces that promote inclusivity, revenue increases by 28% and staff turnover decreases by 30%, benefitting everyone.



As a good rule of thumb:

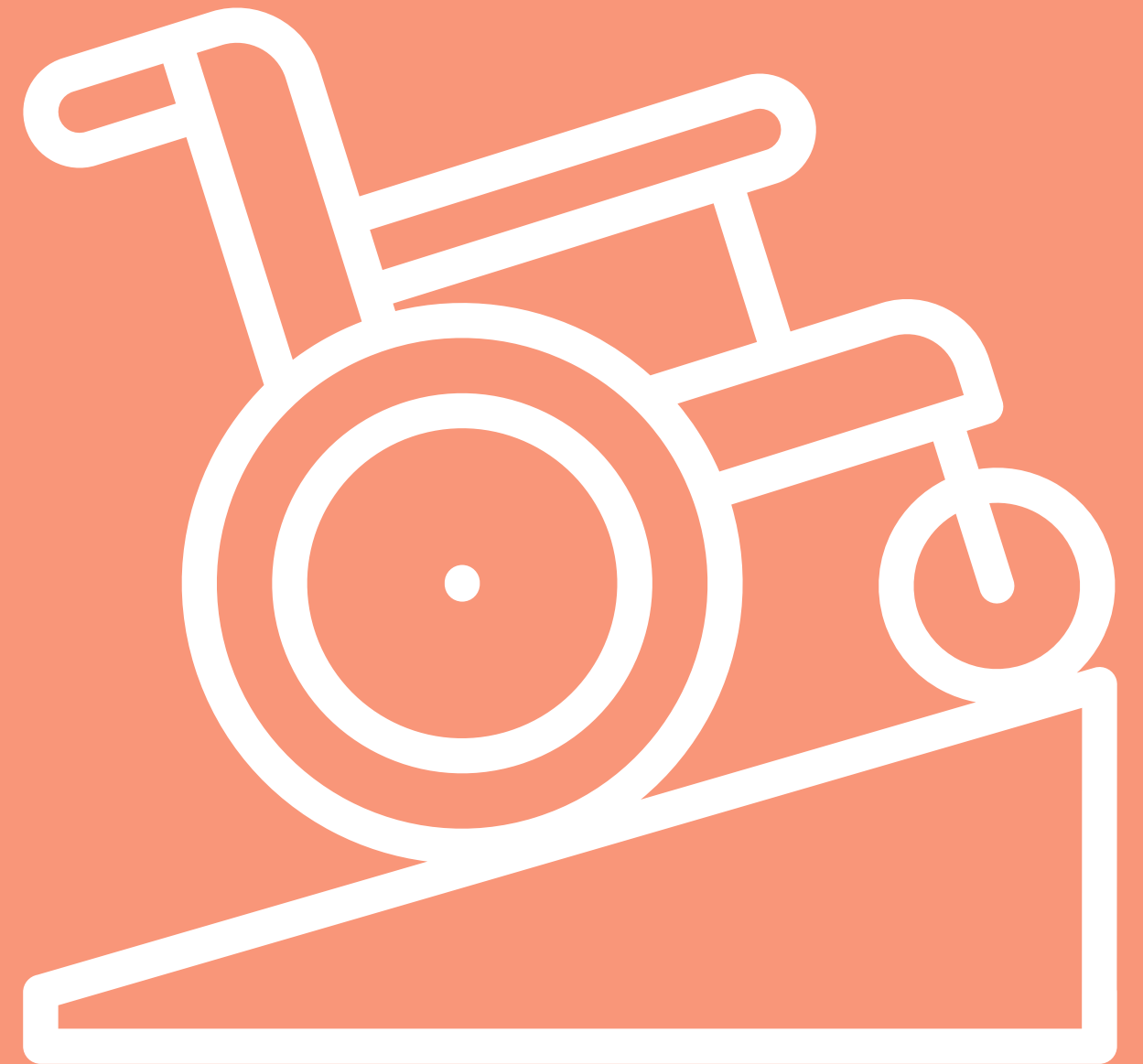
- You should never make comments about someone's physical ability without respectfully speaking with them first
- Recognize that being healthy is a privilege not everyone is afforded and understand that for many this is something outside of their control
- You should never use language that makes a disability the butt of a joke
- Respect that all bodies and minds are different and not all people will have the same ability or capacity as you
- Never make a judgmental comment about someone's mobility or disability aids or other accommodations they may have
- Ask respectful, good faith questions in order to learn and grow!


Accessibility and Inclusion

Accessibility: The quality of being possible to get into, use, make use of.

Inclusion: Inclusion, comparatively, means that all products, services, and societal opportunities and resources are fully accessible, welcoming, functional and usable for as many different types of abilities as reasonably possible.

In order for a workplace to be inclusive, it must be accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities!





Inaccessibility is often the result of a lack of awareness rather than an intentional act of discrimination.

The solution is making an intentional effort to stay mindful of accessibility!

Accessibility questions to ask yourself:

Physical

- Can people with physical disabilities access the building?
- Will people with different physical capacities be able to fully participate in this event?
- Can someone with visual or auditory impairments navigate this activity?
- Are we creating an environment where people with different physical abilities feel safe?

Mental Health

- Are we respecting the boundaries and triggers of people with trauma?
- How can we create space for people that struggle with mental health to find support?
- How do we react when someone around us has a mental health episode?
- Are we unintentionally creating barriers for people to access therapy and other support tools?
- Are we creating a workplace culture that supports rather than stigmatizes mental health?

Intellectual

- Are we being mindful of neurodiversity or assuming everyone has the same intellectual capacity?
- Are we using simple, accessible language to relay messages and instructions?
- Are we mindful of sensory triggers that could harm someone with a disability?
- Do we talk to people with intellectual disabilities in a way that respects their dignity?

Health

- Is our building accessible to people with chronic health conditions?
- Are we being mindful of environmental factors that could harm people with health conditions?
- Do we reward attendance and punctuality at the expense of people taking care of their bodies?
- Do we respect the boundaries of chronically ill people?

Language around Disability

Instead of saying:

Special needs, differently abled

Stupid, r-worded, dumb

Bipolar, manic

Wheelchair-bound, crippled

Psycho, mentally ill

Normal, healthy, clean

Use:

Disabled

Frustrating, annoying, irritating

Emotional

Wheelchair user, uses mobility aids

Illogical

Abled, non-disabled

Sources: Access Living Harvard Business Review

Under the social model of disability, by creating a more accessible workplace we can create a more inclusive environment where everyone can perform their best, regardless of ability!



Sources:

<https://mydiversability.com/about>

<https://nccj.org/resources/ableism/>

<https://triangle-inc.org/epic-training/?>

[gad=1&gclid=Cj0KCQjwilOmBhDjARIsAP6YhSWkpnNG9G_tCEBkFnqH-JEWLQuu3zKZI-njCVEHN0T050YZwQqVJm8aAmf7EALw_wcB \](https://www.google.com/search?q=triangle+inc+epic+training&rlz=Cj0KCQjwilOmBhDjARIsAP6YhSWkpnNG9G_tCEBkFnqH-JEWLQuu3zKZI-njCVEHN0T050YZwQqVJm8aAmf7EALw_wcB)

<https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/disability-models>

<https://aem.cast.org/get-started/defining-accessibility>

<https://www.accessliving.org/newsroom/blog/ableism-101/>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4202623/>

<https://hbr.org/2020/12/why-you-need-to-stop-using-these-words-and-phrases>