



The Five Beyond Awareness Fundamentals: What Kids Need to Know About Disability

Too often, we find ourselves teaching children about the limitations of people who have disabilities. We blind-fold them to teach about blindness, when in fact, being blind-folded for a few minutes cannot adequately enlighten us about the experience of being blind. There are many factors involved in the experience of disability, and those most frustrating are the ones that stem from societal ignorance and apathy. Children already know too much about what is different. We need to appreciate the differences, but for the purpose of creating possibilities of accommodations and access, while addressing that we are more alike than different, and that societal barriers impair people's abilities more than disabilities do. For this reason, we need to stay away from simulation activities and focus on fundamental areas that can ultimately make a difference for people who have disabilities, and for us all.

The Five Beyond Awareness Fundamentals are:

Accessibility & Accommodations

Assistive Technology

Attitudes & Assumptions

Disability Rights History

Respectful Language

When children learn about accessibility, then they can be alert of barriers that prevent access. When they learn about assistive technology, they become creative in finding solutions to barriers. When they reflect on disempowering attitudes and mistaken assumptions, they become advocates for respect and dignity. When they learn about the amazing civil rights movement that granted rights to people who had until recently in history been denied basic human rights, they become enlightened, sensitive citizens, who understand the importance of being involved citizens. And when they learn the power of respectful disability language, they become proactive diversity change agents, educating others around them through their words. By focusing on the Five Beyond Awareness Fundamentals, we can reach our target of creating a world where all people are valued and included. But if we continue to focus on how "*they*" are different, today's children will continue our tradition of devaluing, segregating, and isolating those who we deem too different to be one of "*us*."



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