

What is Disability?

The word “disability” means different things to different people, and the language we use to talk about disability evolves.

The Accessible Canada Act defines disability as “any impairment, including a physical, mental, intellectual, cognitive, learning, communication or sensory impairment—or a functional limitation—whether permanent, temporary or episodic in nature, or evident or not, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders a person’s full and equal participation in society.”



Permanent disabilities are long-term conditions that are expected to remain with the person for their lifetime. E.g., blindness, autism, and paraplegia.



Temporary disabilities are short-term injuries, illnesses, or conditions that only remain with the person for a limited period of time but can create a barrier to access for the individual. E.g., a broken bone or concussion.



An **episodic disability** involves fluctuating periods and degrees of wellness and disability. These periods can be unpredictable in duration, types of symptoms, and frequency of recurrence. E.g., multiple sclerosis, arthritis, and epilepsy.



Situational disability refers to the experience of disability that arises from the situation or environment a person is in. E.g., in a large crowd, you can’t hear well, or in a car, you can be visually impaired by the glare of the sun.

Disability-Inclusive Language Tips

Ask the person

- If a person shares that they have a disability, ask if they have a disability language preference. Some people have strong preferences and others may not.
- Don't impose your idea of "correct" language on them, even if that's what someone else used in conversation in the past. If you don't understand the use of certain terms or perspectives—ask.

Don't reference disability as a tragedy

- Avoid phrases like 'suffers from' which suggest discomfort, constant pain, and a sense of hopelessness. Wheelchair users do not view themselves as 'confined to a wheelchair' or 'wheelchair bound'—try 'uses a wheelchair' instead.

Take the disabled person's lead

- Most disabled people are comfortable with the words used to describe daily living. People who use wheelchairs 'go for walks' and people with vision loss may be very pleased - or not - 'to see you'.
- A disability may just mean that some things are done differently, but it also may not!

If you make a mistake, apologize and move on

- People with disabilities are generally used to educating others about their needs and preferences and understand that things will not always go perfectly.
- Some people may be offended by the use of outdated language, but if you apologize and explain you didn't know, they will hopefully understand, and you have an opportunity to learn and do better.

Unconscious Bias

What is unconscious bias?

Unconscious biases are deeply ingrained attitudes that we have been socialized to accept and that lead to unjust and discriminatory practices.

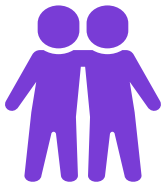
Why do we have unconscious bias?

Unconscious bias is a natural cognitive process, coming from our brain's need to process a lot of information quickly.

How is unconscious bias shaped?

Unconscious bias forms over time through the experiences we have, the culture we grow up in, and the media we're exposed to. These repeated messages shape how we see the world and others, even if we don't realize.

There are many types of unconscious biases, such as:



Affinity Bias

Favouring people who are similar to us



Confirmation Bias

Looking to confirm our own opinions and pre-existing ideas



Halo Effect

Letting one positive trait shape your overall impression of a person



Horn Effect

Letting one mistake or negative trait unfairly influence your entire view of a person

Workplace Adjustments

What are workplace adjustments?

- Workplace adjustments are changes made to help an individual meet the requirements or expectations of a role or activity
- They support participation, and may not always be specifically related to disabilities
- They can support better performance by focusing on an individual's strengths

Remember — one size does not fit all when it comes to workplace adjustments. Ask teammates what they need!

Examples of workplace adjustments:

Communication

- Images that replace text-based instructions
- Timers and alerts as reminders for task completion

Physical Environment

- Relocating lunchroom to main floor
- Clutter-free backrooms and lunchrooms

Onboarding

- Pair new hires with a buddy
- Support with e-learnings, additional training time

Workplace Culture

- Celebrate disability-related days of significance
- Encourage teammates to speak up about challenges

Disability in Canada

Source: Canadian Survey on Disability, 2022, Statistics Canada

8 million people

aged 15 and older have at least one disability



72%
of people with disabilities experienced one or more barriers to accessibility



7 in 10 people with disabilities have two or more disabilities



nearly half (46%) of people with disabilities aged 25-64 have a mental health related disability



30%
the rate of disability was higher among women (30%) than men (24%)

The category “Women+” includes women and some non-binary persons while the category “Men+” includes men and some non-binary persons.

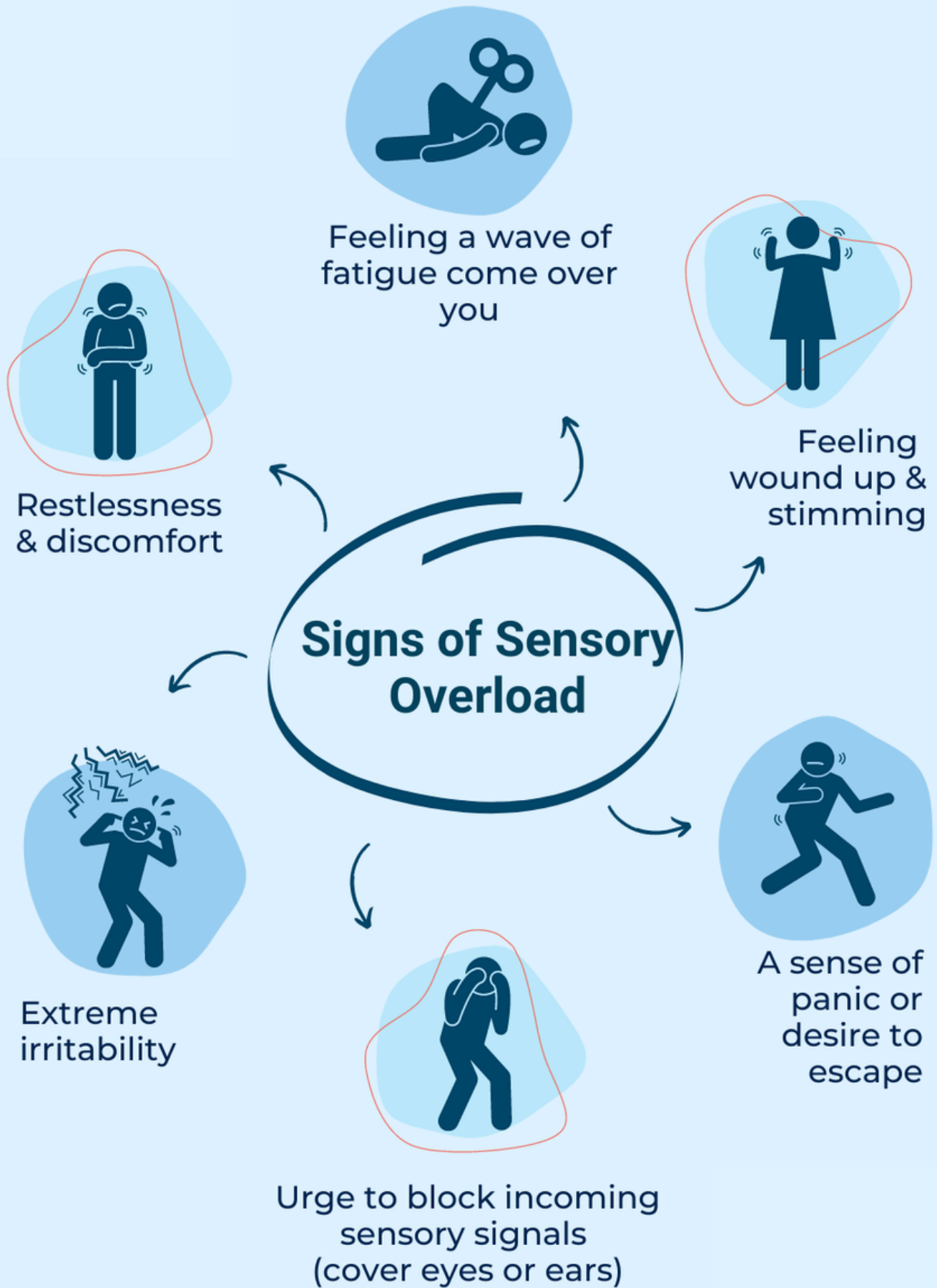
Inclusive Language

What is Inclusive Language?

Inclusive language means choosing words that don't stereotype, exclude, or put people down. The words we use matter, they can make people feel welcome or left out. When we use inclusive language, we show respect and invite everyone into the conversation.

Language changes over time, and some words that were common in the past aren't acceptable now. Using those terms can offend people, make them feel excluded, and discourage them from taking part.

Instead of this...	Say this...
Handicapped (spaces or places) e.g., handicapped parking	Accessible (spaces or places) e.g., accessible parking
Handicap, differently-abled, special needs, challenged, the disabled	Person with a disability, disabled person
Able-bodied, normal, healthy	Non-disabled person, person without a disability
Suffers from/victim of/struggles with e.g., Joe suffers from arthritis	[Person] has, they identify with e.g., Joe has arthritis
Caretaker	Support worker, Support person
Wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user, person who uses a wheelchair



What is Neurodiversity?

Neurodiversity means that people experience and interact with the world in different ways. These differences can affect focus, communication, learning, and sensory experiences—and they are a normal part of being human.

Some examples of neurodiverse conditions include:

AUTISM



A neurodevelopmental condition characterized by differences in social communication, sensory processing, and behaviour.

ADHD



A neurodevelopmental condition marked by differences in attention, impulsivity, and activity level.

DYSLEXIA



A learning disorder involving difficulty with reading, spelling, and written language. Also includes learning differences such as Dyscalculia (math) and Dyspraxia (coordination and motor planning)

Active Listening

Supporting More Effective & Inclusive Communication

Active listening is the practice of being fully present in a conversation. Not just hearing words, but absorbing meaning, reading context, and responding with intention.



Use positive body language

Focus on the teammate.



Show empathy, paraphrase and validate

Listen with intent – put yourself in their shoes.



Avoid Judgement

Come into the conversation with an open mind/heart – “My experience is one of many”.



Ask questions

How can I help? What support do you need? How can we partner to support you in the workplace?



Don't try to fix a situation right away & evaluate

Ensure you understand the situation and evaluate the conversation.



Summarize the discussion & next steps

“Here’s what we discussed today. Do you agree?”

Not all disabilities are visible, but all are valid.

