



## **Disability Pride: What is it? How can we express it?**

If you've ever met some older disability advocates, they will talk about how having "disability pride" is probably the most important part of advocacy. You might be thinking, "Wait, how can you be proud of not being able to do things and having to use big and bulky equipment to have fun, or having different learning abilities and being in special ed classes?" It turns out that "disability pride" is a lot more complicated than you'd think, and it's something we all need to have. It's being comfortable with yourself, understanding that your disability is a unique part of you, and realizing that there are other people with disabilities and you are part of a community that has done amazing things.

There are three parts of disability pride: acceptance, community and history.

### **Acceptance:**

- You can't do anything if you sit around in denial.
- Accept who you are! You have a disability, and you can't change that (no intention of being cruel, but there is no fix that will make you "normal.")
- Even if there was a fix, you'd still know what it felt like and what life was like as someone who was disabled.
- "Why me" moments will happen. There'll always be a time when you wonder how life would be better or different if you weren't disabled. You may feel sadness and anger at not having the same life as everyone else. That's okay. It's part of the acceptance process.
- Your disability doesn't define who you are; it is just a part of you, like your hair, your hobbies, and your laugh. It's another part that makes you the unique and wonderful person you are.
- Acknowledge what your limitations are, but don't use "I can't do it" as an excuse. Instead, understand where you are limited and where you might need help. This helps you to overcome barriers because you know what you need assistance with, and you learn to ask for that help.
- Realize all the opportunities that have come because of your disability. After all, for example, there might be friends you never would've met if you weren't disabled.



## Community:

- There are many other people with disabilities around you. They have faced many of the same challenges as you have, except maybe under different circumstances. They understand your needs and experiences and what you're going through. Part of community is learning how to support each other and developing strong bonds.
- When you have friends behind you, life becomes a lot easier.
- If you see anyone with a disability that needs help or could use the experience of disability community, get to know them. Don't hesitate to invite them into your community.
- The more friends (community members) there are, the more you can help each other achieve independence, interdependence and dreams.
- It takes a lot of hard work to make big changes, but being part of a community can lead to making history.

## History and the Disability Movement:

- People with disabilities have to deal with a lot of obstacles. In the past, many shops, theaters, schools and restaurants weren't accessible. Things like menus and school books weren't in Braille, and the TTY phone system didn't exist.
- If we find something that isn't accessible to us, we need to speak out about it! The only reason some places are more accessible now is because people advocated together for these rights. It might seem scary, and sometimes it is, but by being brave and voicing your opinion, you make things better for yourself and others. You are part of something bigger than your own personal battles. When you advocate for your rights and equality, you make things better for people with disabilities all across America and the world.
- Understand the history of people with disabilities. Heroes like Justin Dart Jr., Ed Roberts and Judy Heumann brought people together and fought for things we're still working for today (access, equal rights, and education).
  - Justin Dart fought tirelessly for the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) which makes most public places including bathrooms, etc. accessible to us and provides interpreters and other accommodations.



- Ed Roberts was the first physically disabled student to go college. He used a ventilator and was told that he could never go to college, even by the people who were supposed to help support him and his dreams.
- Judy Heumann helped organize the 504 protests in California. Section 504 was the first disability rights law, stating that if any group or place received federal funding (like schools, etc.), it had to be accessible.
- Without understanding where we've come from, we can't appreciate the rights we have now and how far we still need to go.

### Ways to Express Disability Pride

- **T-shirts.** There are many shirts that express disability pride, from the iconic logos to ones that simply say "disability pride."
- **Toys.** There are lots of fun toys that have a positive disability image.
- **Express yourself through the arts.** Write poetry, go to a poetry slam or paint about your experience. Show your disability as something positive. Plays are great, too. There are integrated theater troupes that show disability as something positive to kids.
- **Go to the disability pride parade** in Chicago, Illinois or San Jose, California, or start one in your community.
- **Talk to people and change opinions.** Self-confidence is the best way to express your pride. Just believe in your own strength.

### Resources:

KASA Disability History Timeline: <http://fvkasa.org/resources/files/history-timeline.php>

Check out all the KASA Disability History and Culture Resources at: <http://fvkasa.org/resources/history.php>

Disability Pride Parade: <http://www.disabilityprideparade.com/>