

FROM PITY TO PRIDE

It takes a shift in one's thinking to change a system!!! We need to make a philosophical shift in how we view disability. We need to examine our attitudes and beliefs around disability in order to improve the systems that serve people with disabilities, be better parents and family members, and be an ally.

Cycle of a Proud Identity:

- 1. Acknowledgement** - This includes acknowledgement of their disability as part of their identity.
 - Getting rid of the messages that we are just “special” or that we are “just like everyone else.” Instead, we need to acknowledge that we are different – we are part of natural human diversity – and diversity is not a bad thing.
- 2. Community** – This includes realizing that you are not the only one and finding a place where you fit in.
 - Knowing there are many others like you – with the same barriers put on us by society. It is having a shared understanding of the oppression you face with others like you. It is sharing common experiences with other people with disabilities – talking to people who “get it.”
- 3. Movement** – This includes realizing you are part of a larger movement for social justice.

- Learning about disability history (both the oppression and resistance). Looking at how long we have been oppressed and how far we have come over the years. Realizing how long people in your community have been fighting for equality.
4. **Pride** – This includes being able to say “I’m disabled” while also having a sense of pride instead of shame.
 - Not hiding or denying your disability. Using your community’s history as fuel to move forward and continue to fight for justice. Finding great power and excitement when around a large group of people with disabilities.

Building Blocks of Pride:

1. **Acknowledge** – Acknowledge their disability. Help them acknowledge the losses and the gifts that come with disability.
2. **Language** – Use language that supports disability pride.
3. **History and Culture** – Expose people to disability history and culture. Learn about it yourself.
4. **Inclusion** – Make your programs inclusive of people with disabilities. Acknowledge the importance of community (spaces for people with disabilities only) but know that it must be by choice.

5. **Practice** – Allow people with disabilities the opportunities to practice being proud. You should practice what you preach. If you are teaching disability pride, you should believe in disability pride.

Benefits of Pride:

- **Increased Self-Esteem** – As one accepts themselves they have a higher self-esteem and self-confidence
- **Accommodations** – When one knows they have a disability, they know what accommodations they need. When they are proud of their disability, they are able to advocate for the accommodations they need without feeling a sense of shame or like they are asking for something “special.”
- **Increased Independence/Interdependence** – As one gets the accommodations they need, they are more likely to be independent and successful in their lives, housing situations, places of employment, educational settings, personal relationships, community involvement, etc. Increased value of interdependence – knowing it is okay to rely on others.
- **Community Inclusion** – As people become more independent in the places mentioned above, they become more likely to be included in community activities.