

10 Principles of Disability Justice

From our vantage point within Sins Invalid, where we incubate the framework and practice of disability justice, this emerging framework has ten principles, each offering opportunities for movement building:

1. INTERSECTIONALITY

Simply put, this principle says that we are many things, and they all impact us. We are not only disabled, we are also each coming from a specific experience of race, class, sexuality, age, religious background, geographical location, immigration status, and more. Depending on context, we all have areas where we experience privilege, as well as areas of oppression. The term “intersectionality” was first introduced by feminist theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the experiences of Black women, who experience both racism and sexism in specific ways. We gratefully embrace the nuance that this principle brings to our lived experiences, and the ways it shapes the perspectives we offer.

2. LEADERSHIP OF THOSE MOST IMPACTED

When we talk about ableism, racism, sexism & transmisogyny, colonization, police violence, etc., we are not looking to academics and experts to tell us what’s what — we are lifting up, listening to, reading, following, and highlighting the perspectives of those who are most impacted by the systems we fight against. By centering the leadership of those most impacted, we keep ourselves grounded in real-world problems and find creative strategies for resistance.

3. ANTI-CAPITALIST POLITICS

Capitalism depends on wealth accumulation for some (the white ruling class), at the expense of others, and encourages competition as a means of survival. The nature of our disabled bodyminds means that we resist conforming to “normative” levels of productivity in a capitalist culture, and our labor is often invisible to a system that defines labor by able-bodied, white supremacist, gender normative standards. Our worth is not dependent on what and how much we can produce.

4. CROSS-MOVEMENT SOLIDARITY

Disability justice can only grow into its potential as a movement by aligning itself with racial justice, reproductive justice, queer and trans liberation, prison abolition, environmental justice, anti-police terror, Deaf activism, fat liberation, and other movements working for justice and liberation. This means challenging white disability

communities around racism and challenging other movements to confront ableism. Through cross-movement solidarity, we create a united front.

5. RECOGNIZING WHOLENESS

Each person is full of history and life experience. Each person has an internal experience composed of our own thoughts, sensations, emotions, sexual fantasies, perceptions, and quirks. Disabled people are whole people.

6. SUSTAINABILITY

We learn to pace ourselves, individually and collectively, to be sustained long-term. We value the teachings of our bodies and experiences, and use them as a critical guide and reference point to help us move away from urgency and into a deep, slow, transformative, unstoppable wave of justice and liberation.

7. COMMITMENT TO CROSS-DISABILITY SOLIDARITY

We value and honor the insights and participation of all of our community members, even and especially those who are most often left out of political conversations. We are building a movement that breaks down isolation between people with physical impairments, people who are sick or chronically ill, psych survivors and people with mental health disabilities, neurodiverse people, people with intellectual or developmental disabilities, Deaf people, Blind people, people with environmental injuries and chemical sensitivities, and all others who experience ableism and isolation that undermines our collective liberation.

8. INTERDEPENDENCE

Before the massive colonial project of Western European expansion, we understood the nature of interdependence within our communities. We see the liberation of all living systems and the land as integral to the liberation of our own communities, as we all share one planet. We work to meet each other's needs as we build toward liberation, without always reaching for state solutions which inevitably extend state control further into our lives.

9. COLLECTIVE ACCESS

As Black and brown and queer crips, we bring flexibility and creative nuance to our engagement with each other. We create and explore ways of doing things that go beyond able-bodied and neurotypical norms. Access needs aren't shameful – we all function differently depending on context and environment. Access needs can be articulated and met privately, through a collective, or in community, depending upon an individual's needs, desires, and the capacity of the group. We can share responsibility for our access needs, we can ask that our needs be met without compromising our integrity, we can balance autonomy while being in community, we can be unafraid of our vulnerabilities, knowing our strengths are respected.

10. COLLECTIVE LIBERATION

We move together as people with mixed abilities, multiracial, multi-gendered, mixed class, across the sexual spectrum, with a vision that leaves no bodymind behind.

This is disability justice. We honor the longstanding legacies of resilience and resistance which are the inheritance of all of us whose bodies and minds will not conform. Disability justice is not yet a broad based popular movement. Disability justice is a vision and practice of what is yet-to-be, a map that we create with our ancestors and our great-grandchildren onward, in the width and depth of our multiplicities and histories, a movement towards a world in which every body and mind is known as beautiful.

[Image Description: Words of various fonts on a watercolor background with veins that look like trees, and layered clusters of bubbles that look like alveoli in the lungs. Text reads: INTERSECTIONALITY. LEADERSHIP OF THOSE MOST IMPACTED. ANTI-CAPITALISM. CROSS-MOVEMENT ORGANIZING. WHOLENESS. SUSTAINABILITY. CROSS-DISABILITY SOLIDARITY. INTERDEPENDENCE. COLLECTIVE ACCESS. COLLECTIVE LIBERATION. Text by Patty Berne and Sins Invalid. Design by Nomy Lamm.]