

# A Vermont Example of Training for New Staff

- Slides about Ableism
- The Rocks Exercise - bringing the voices of our members into our workshops.
- Links to videos addressing Disability Acceptance



# Everyone has rights

Everyone has the right to be safe.

Everyone has the right to control their own lives. This is called **self-determination**.

Everyone has human rights like:

- choosing where to live
- going to school and choosing where to go to school
- working and choosing what work to do
- marrying and having children
- voting

Human rights are what everyone needs to be free.



# What is Disability?

Disability is just another way for someone's mind and/or body to be.

A disability can affect how a person:

- sees
- hears
- thinks
- learns
- feels
- moves
- communicates
- interacts with other people

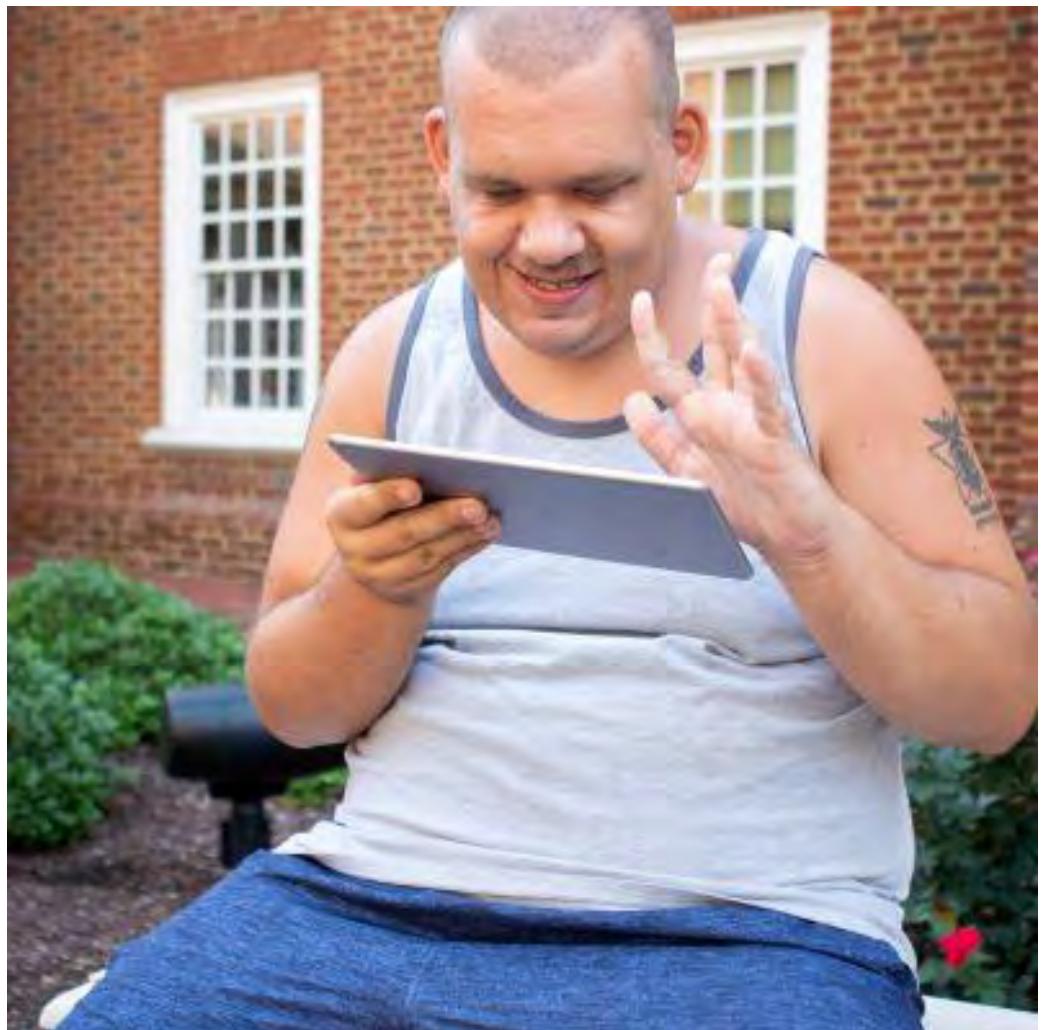
Some people prefer to say “disabled people” or “disabled person.” Other people prefer to say “people with disabilities” or “person with a disability.” We use both terms.



You can't always tell that someone is disabled by looking at them.

People with disabilities get to choose how we talk about our disabilities. We choose what words we use and how much to tell other people.

Disability is part of who we are. All kinds of people can have disabilities.



Different societies around the world think about disability in different ways. The places where you grow up can affect what you think about disability.

If we live long enough, most people will have a disability at some point in our lives.

Disabilities affect our daily lives. We might need support. Here are some examples of supports:

# Disabled people have more problems if we don't have support

The world is not built for disabled people. The world we live in is built for people who do not have disabilities.



We assume that everyone can see, walk, and hear.

Everyone uses accommodations. But we might not think about them as accommodations, because they meet most people's needs.

Green Mountain Self-Advocates like to bring the voices of our members into our workshops. We have been collecting stories and comments from our members.

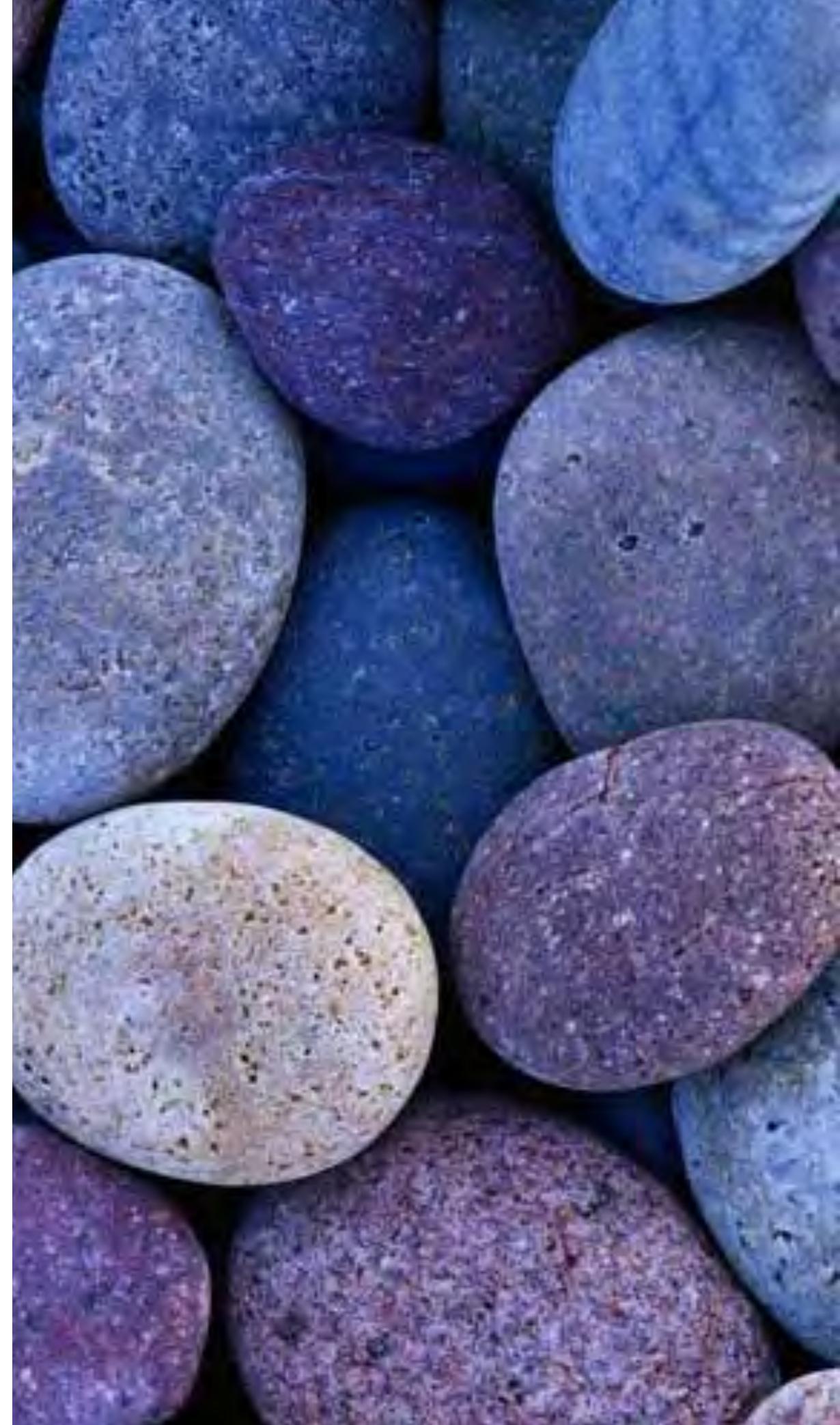
These are examples of the words and actions that people with disabilities face every day.

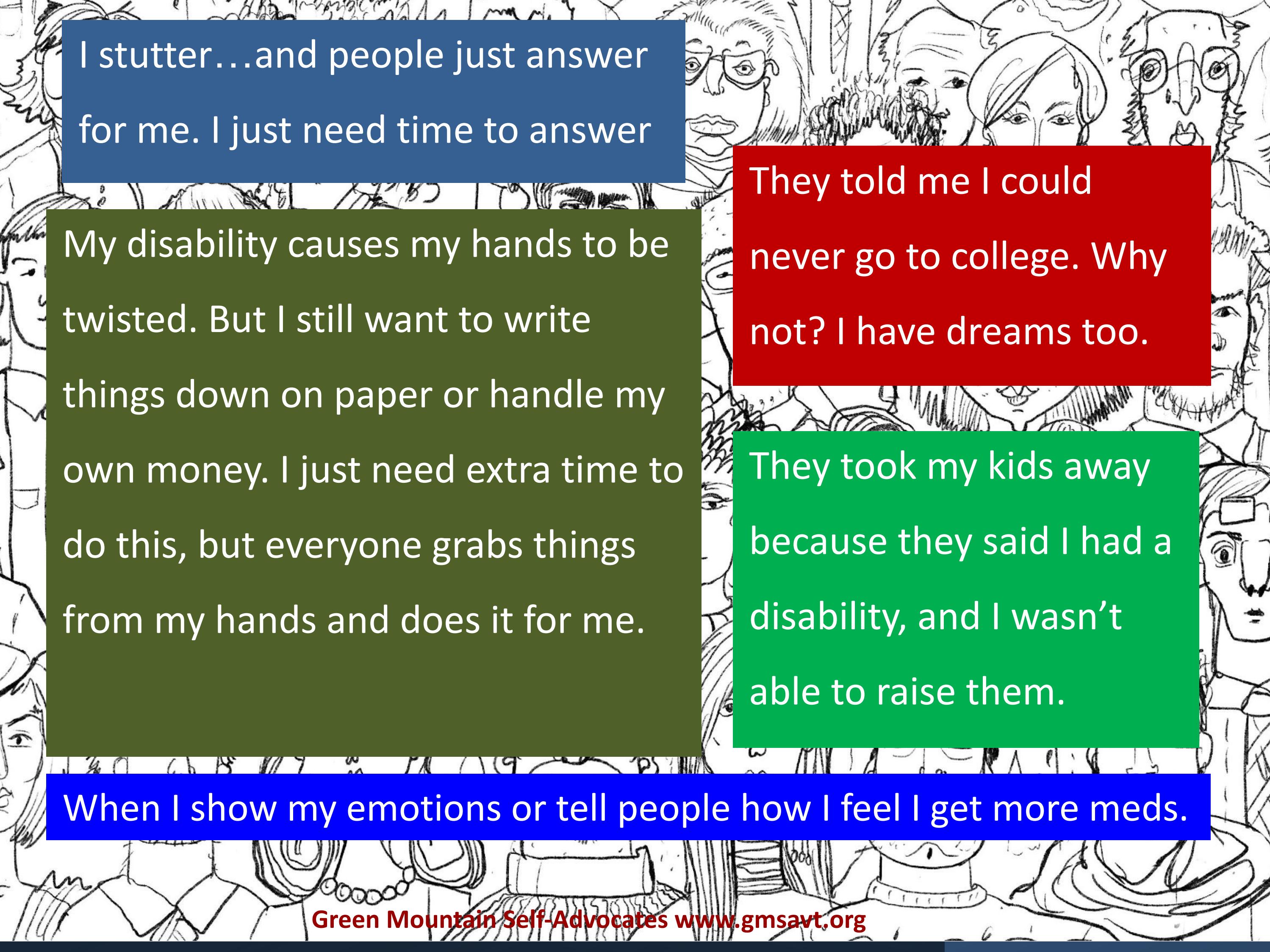
We find that the words and actions of others impact our lives more than our disabilities.

We are going to take turns reading comments. We will not discuss what we hear. Just listen as we read all the comments.

**When we do this exercise in-person we put each comment on a piece of paper and use a rubber band to attach each comment to a rock. We put all the rocks in a backpack.**

**This bag of rocks with comments is heavy. The words and actions of others towards people with disabilities is a heavy burden.**





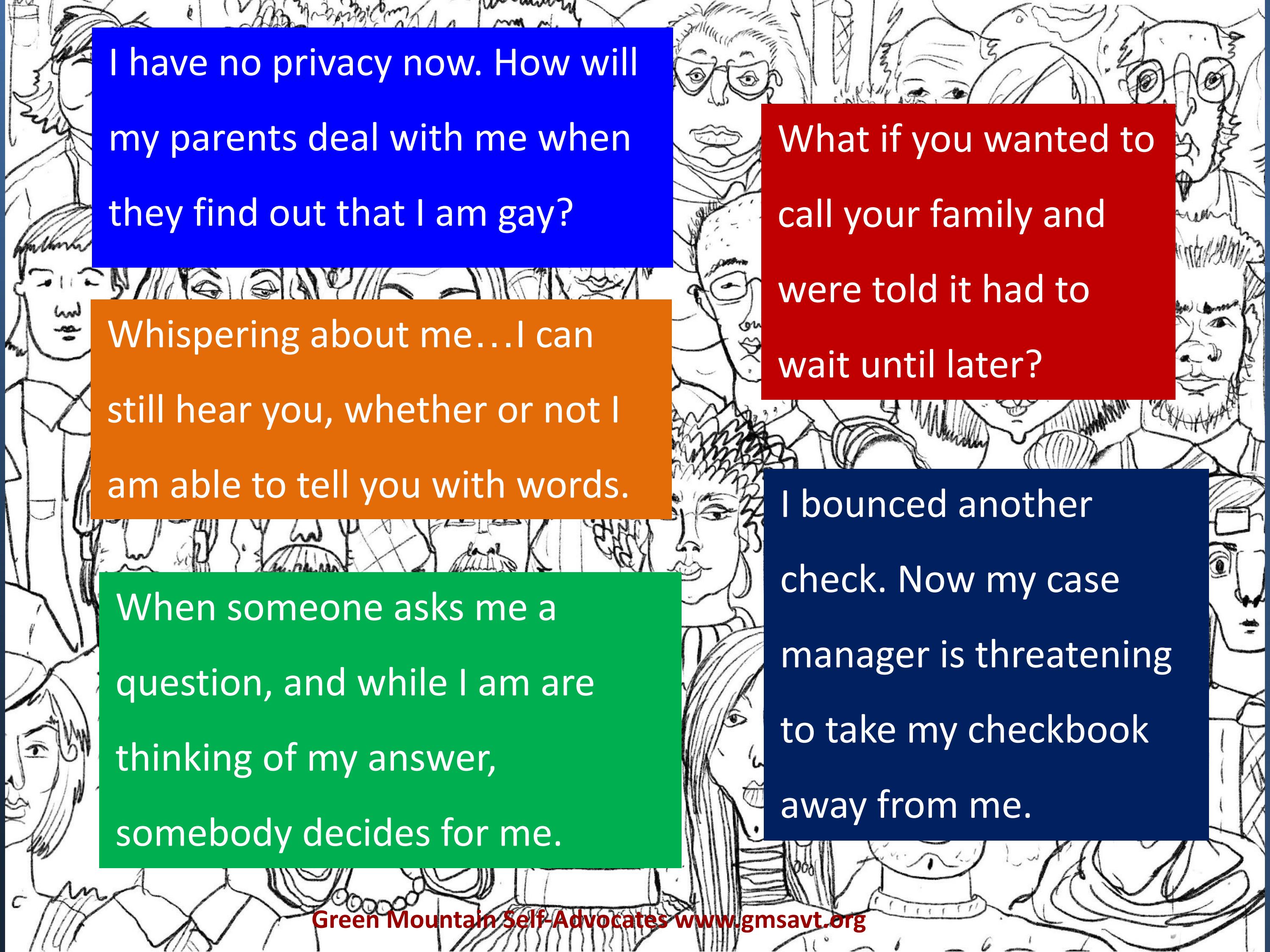
I stutter...and people just answer for me. I just need time to answer

My disability causes my hands to be twisted. But I still want to write things down on paper or handle my own money. I just need extra time to do this, but everyone grabs things from my hands and does it for me.

They told me I could never go to college. Why not? I have dreams too.

They took my kids away because they said I had a disability, and I wasn't able to raise them.

When I show my emotions or tell people how I feel I get more meds.



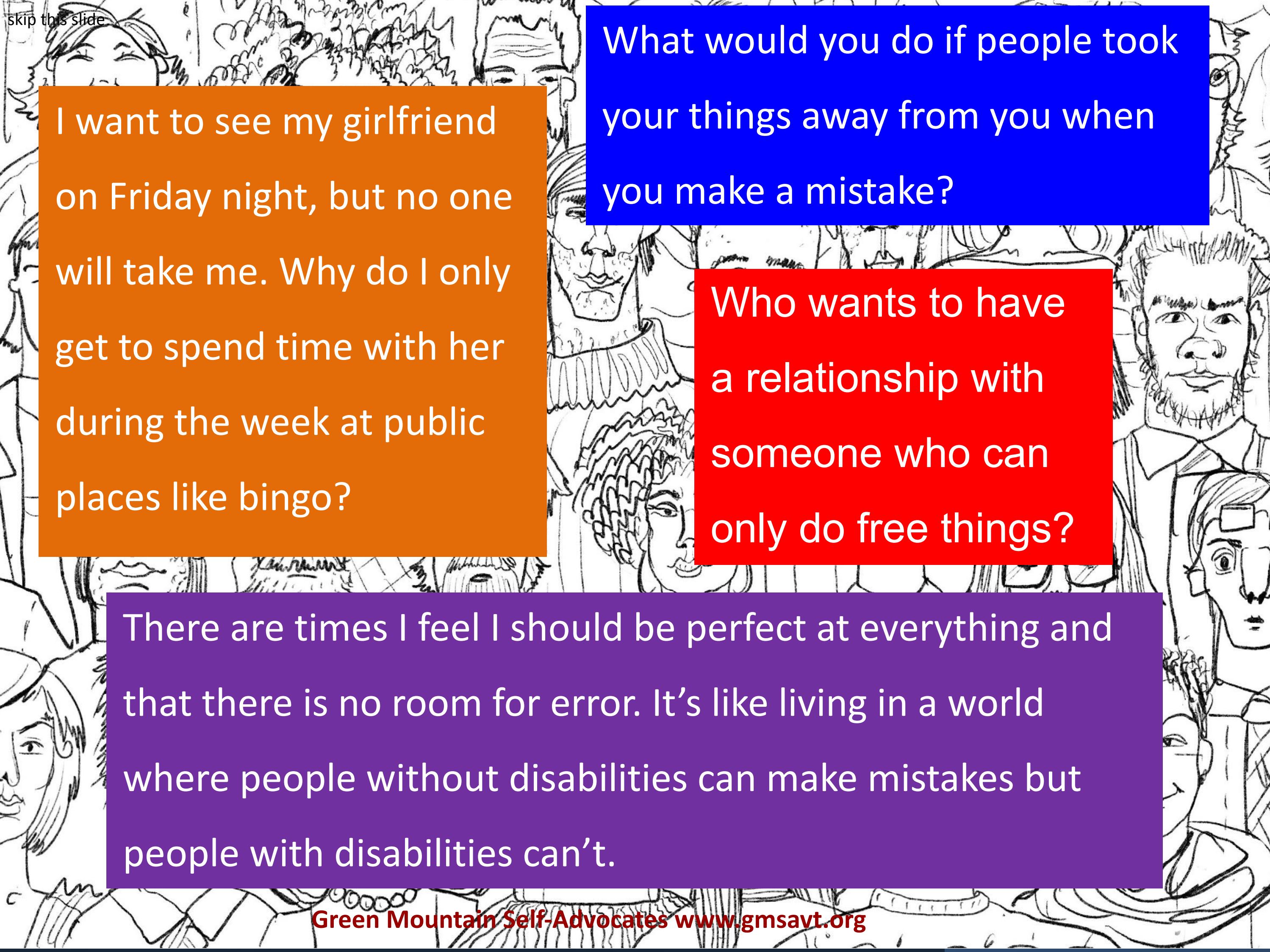
I have no privacy now. How will my parents deal with me when they find out that I am gay?

Whispering about me...I can still hear you, whether or not I am able to tell you with words.

When someone asks me a question, and while I am thinking of my answer, somebody decides for me.

What if you wanted to call your family and were told it had to wait until later?

I bounced another check. Now my case manager is threatening to take my checkbook away from me.

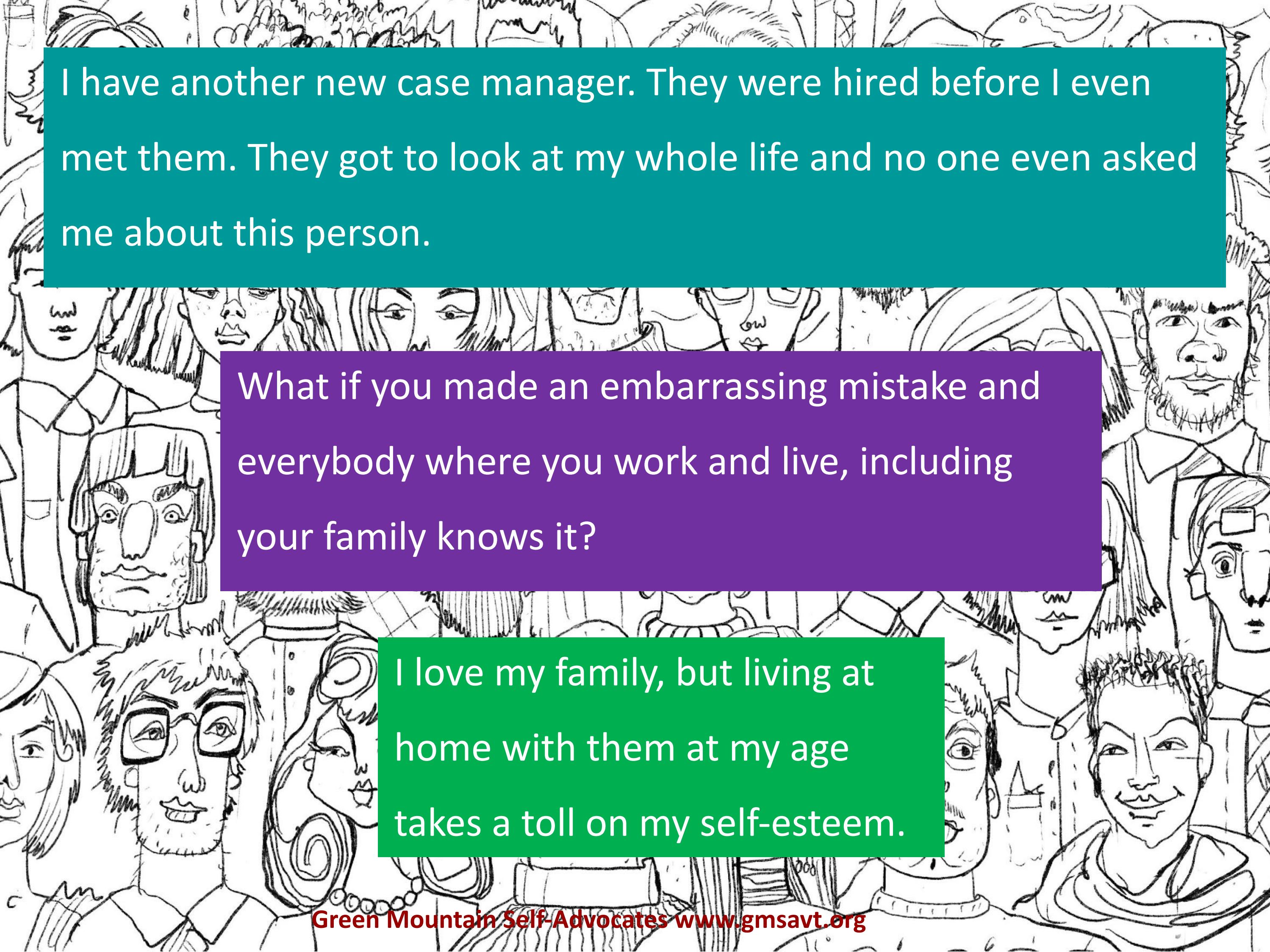


I want to see my girlfriend on Friday night, but no one will take me. Why do I only get to spend time with her during the week at public places like bingo?

What would you do if people took your things away from you when you make a mistake?

Who wants to have a relationship with someone who can only do free things?

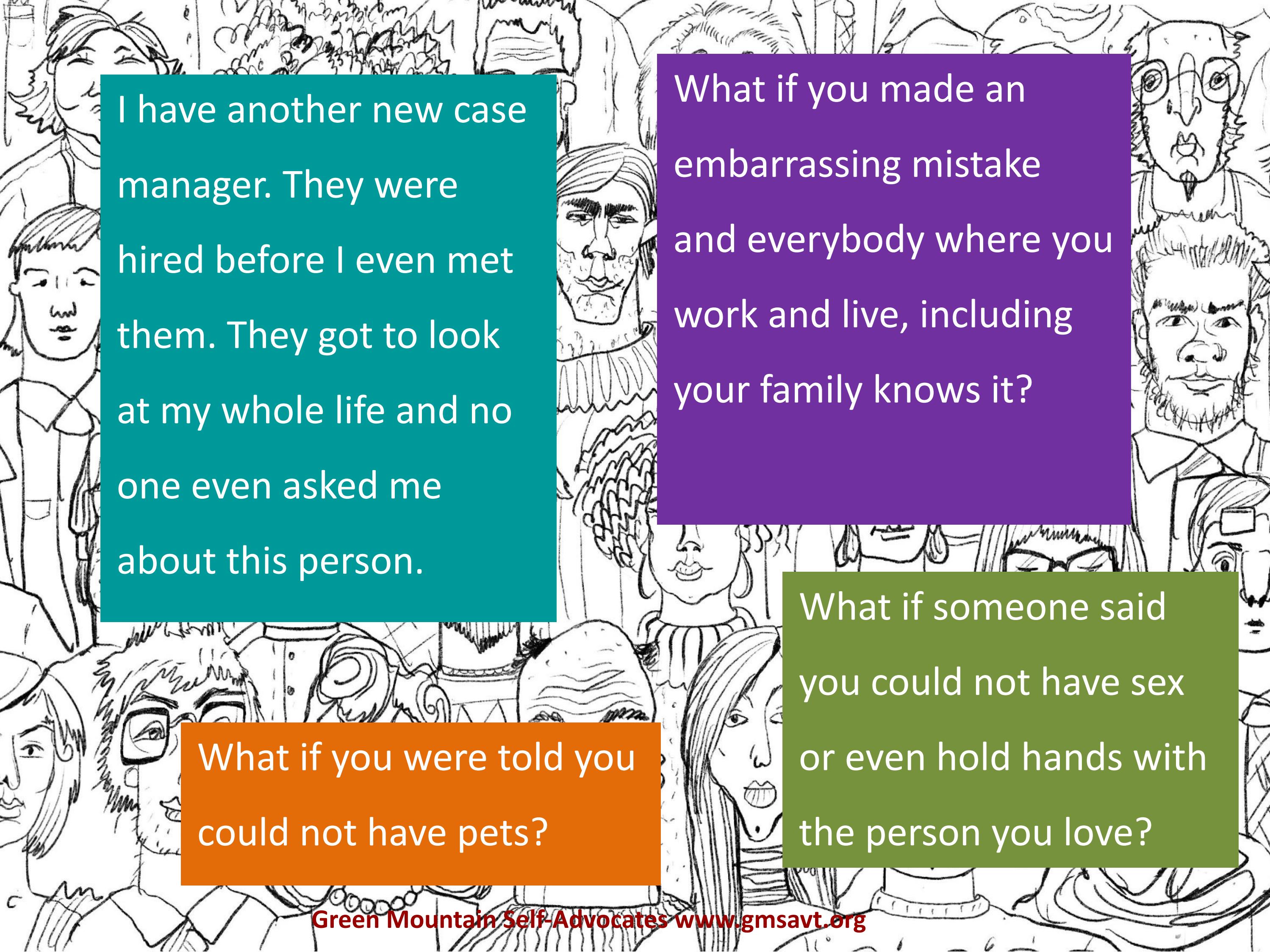
There are times I feel I should be perfect at everything and that there is no room for error. It's like living in a world where people without disabilities can make mistakes but people with disabilities can't.



I have another new case manager. They were hired before I even met them. They got to look at my whole life and no one even asked me about this person.

What if you made an embarrassing mistake and everybody where you work and live, including your family knows it?

I love my family, but living at home with them at my age takes a toll on my self-esteem.



I have another new case manager. They were hired before I even met them. They got to look at my whole life and no one even asked me about this person.

What if you made an embarrassing mistake and everybody where you work and live, including your family knows it?

What if you were told you could not have pets?

What if someone said you could not have sex or even hold hands with the person you love?

# Rocks Activity

Some say having a disability is a burden. We encourage people to be proud of who they are and that includes having a disability. The real burden is the words and actions of others. That is what weighs us down.



# What is Ableism?



#1 - When you hear the word ableism, what comes to mind?

#2 - Can you think of examples of ableism that you have witnessed in the lives of the people you serve?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNMJaXuFuWQ>

# WHAT IS ABLEISM?

Ableism is **discrimination** against people with disabilities. Ableism is like sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Ableism means that people with disabilities as a group are treated unfairly because of our disabilities.

Just like sexism means that women as a group are treated unfairly because they are women. Ableism is wrong. No one should discriminate against disabled people or anyone else. Often people with disabilities are left out. We are left out because the world is not built with us in mind. This is ableism.



People without disabilities might think badly about people with disabilities. They might treat us unfairly because of our disabilities. This is ableism.



If someone hurts us, people might not do anything about it. People might think we cannot make our own choices. They might treat us like kids even when we are adults. They might try to control our lives.



Blind workers in Dearborn, Michigan, picket a Goodwill Industries thrift store, protesting the organization's use of subminimum wages  
(Jim West / Alamy Stock Photo)

Ableism is not just about how one person treats another person. Being polite to people with disabilities will not fix ableism.

Ableism is built into our society. Disabled people don't have the same chances in life. They might be kept apart from other people.



Ableism can make disabled people feel bad about ourselves. This is called internalized ableism.

Ableism can make us think we deserve to be treated badly. People with disabilities can also discriminate against each other.



**[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6c6JLbczC<sub>8</sub>](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6c6JLbczC8)**

# Connections between Ableism / Abuse / Violence

Abuse is when someone has power over someone else and hurts that person.

It is important to recognize abuse whenever it happens.

Make sure a person knows if you have been abused it is not their fault.



# Abuse and Disabilities

People with disabilities are treated like we are worth less than people without disabilities.

People with disabilities are more likely to be hurt or abused.

Here are two examples of bad and hurtful things some people say about people with disabilities:

Ableism can make people forget that violence and abuse against people with disabilities is bad.



Here are two examples of bad and hurtful things some people say about people with disabilities:

Sometimes disabled people need to be treated that way.

Taking care of people with disabilities is stressful.



Neither of these statements is true but, because of ableism, a lot of people believe these things.



If a disabled person is hurt and tries to get help, people might not believe them. Someone might get away with hurting or killing a disabled person, even if everyone knows they did it.

Often when the person being hurt has a disability, people might not try to stop it.

Can you think of any other examples of how people with disabilities were abused or treated unfairly and because of ableism, society just looked the other way?



# WAYS TO RESPOND

People with disabilities decide:

- what ableism is
- what violence is
- how much we want to talk about it
- who we want to talk to



Believe people with disabilities when we say we have been hurt and abused.

People with disabilities need to be able to get supports and services when we have been hurt or abused.

We should be able to get services for people who have been abused.

# Working with Disabled People

Services for abuse survivors need to be accessible to us. **Accessible** means that the services work as well for people with disabilities as for everyone else.

Programs for people with disabilities should be safe places for us to talk about violence.

We need to support people to talk about abuse in their lives.

Violence can be hard to talk about, but it can be painful to stay quiet about it.



When someone tells you what happened to them, ask who else they want to know about it.

Everyone has the right to self-determination.

That means if someone is being hurt, they should be in control of:

- whether they get help
- when they get help
- what kind of help they get
- who gets told that they are being hurt
- what kind of changes to make in their life



If you are a mandated reporter, you need to say that before someone talks to you.

Say what will happen if the person tells you they are being hurt. Say that you can help them find someone to talk to who is not a mandated reporter.

People need to know what will happen if they talk to a mandated reporter. We should also work to change things so that abuse survivors have more control over who reports their abuse.

Everyone should be able to get services that work for them. Services for survivors shouldn't leave anyone out because of their disability, their race, their culture, their sexual orientation, their gender (including being transgender), what language they speak

Know how to help all kinds of people.



Example: Jacob has an intellectual disability. He is also a black gay man. All of these things affect how Jacob gets treated.

When we need services, we should be able to get services that respect all the parts of us. They should be able to give us what we need.

We should get services in the language we speak. We should get accommodations when we need them. No one should say they can't help us because we are too complicated.

Respect all the different ways people communicate. Make sure everyone has access to the things they need to communicate.

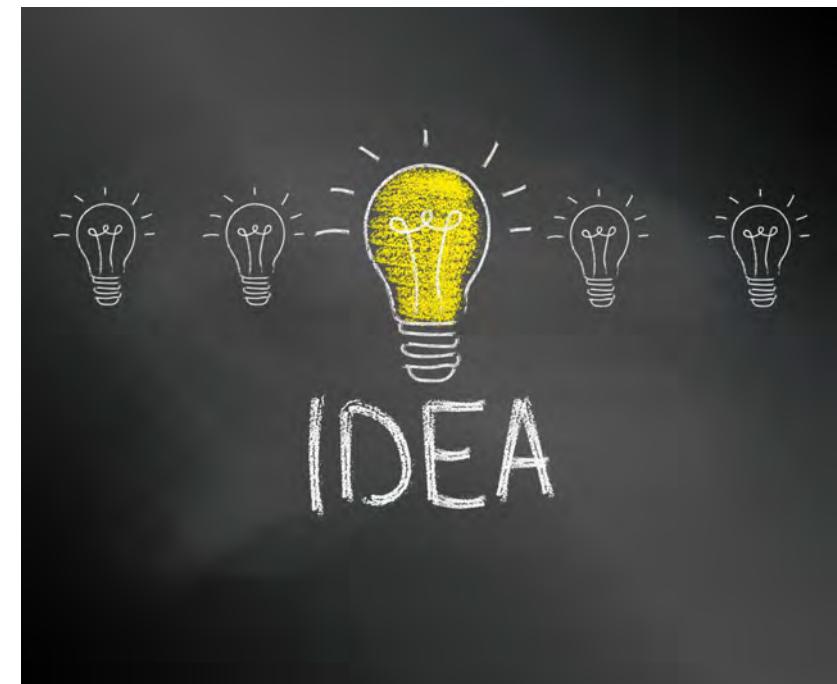
Always check in with the person to make sure they understand. If the way you are trying to communicate with someone isn't working, try a different way.



# WAYS ANYONE CAN TAKE ACTION

Become an ally for people with disabilities. Allies do not tell us what to do. They listen to us and support us to be in charge of our lives.

**What are ways you can  
be an ally promoting a  
greater understanding  
of Ableism?**



Since the murder of George Floyd our communities have been wrestling with understanding the connections between racism and violence.

Thinking about violence can be scary. It can feel like a huge problem that is impossible to solve.

Because it is hard to know what to do, a lot of people do not want to talk or think about violence. But, we can't ignore this problem. Everyone has to help end violence. No one can fix everything all at once. But, there is always a way to help.

As allies to the self-advocacy and disability rights movements, we could use your help talking about how ableism is connected to violence in the lives of people with disability.

**Do you have any suggestions of how we can make sure we are understanding the connections between Ableism and violence?**



# RESOURCES

**PEER-TO-PEER: Bridging the gap through self-advocacy**  
by Vera Institute of Justice, Center on Victimization and Safety, June 2017.

[A Training Manual To Help Self-Advocates Become Peer Supporters](#)

[A Workbook For Classes To Help Self-Advocates Become Peer Supporters](#)

[A Peer to Peer Guide on Domestic and Sexual Violence](#) by Green Mountain Self-Advocates. People with intellectual and developmental disabilities can be more at risk for abuse for many reasons. These guidelines describe domestic and sexual violence. They give examples of what to say and do when you hear about abusive situations.