

# Attitudinal Barriers Guide

Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living

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## How to Use this Guide

Centers for Independent Living (CIL's) were started in the late 1970s, to establish a non-residential center to support people with disabilities, live their independent lives. It took a while for this grassroots effort, known as the Independent Living Movement, to find its way into all 50 states and the US Commonwealth; but we are here, and we are a strong service!

Illinois was one of the first adaptors of the Independent Living Movement, in the early 1980's. Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living (NICIL) is one of the original five (5) CIL's in Illinois.

Fast forward 35-plus years and today, NICIL, as well as 21 other CIL's, continue to work hard every day to develop programming and services that support our consumers, in the five (5) county-NICIL territory which includes: Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle, and Whiteside Counties. Our time is dedicated to serving all people with disabilities to live their independent lives, as they see fit. It is an honor and a privilege to serve!

Our services are tailored to each individual with whom we work. There are some common barriers which keep individuals from living independently. These barriers (or topics) are referred to in the industry as issue areas. There are nine (9) issue areas:

- Assistive Technology
- Attitudinal Barriers
- Communication
- Education
- Employment
- Healthcare Services
- Housing
- Physical Barriers
- Transportation

All NICIL staff are trained to be subject matter experts in these issue areas. Our team has developed issue-area guides to be available to our consumers, which are user friendly. These guides are designed to provide a basic understanding of the issue area, as well as to give information for self-direction. However, we want to be part of the process of independent living, so please, contact our team for one-on-one (individual) services.

Please use this guide to give you a helping hand in understanding the Attitudinal Barriers issue area and use the resources provided as a starting point. When you are ready, know that we are here to support your independent living path.

Check out our website, [www.nicil.org](http://www.nicil.org) for access to all of our issue area guides. Contact the office at 815-625-7860 or via email at [frontdesk@nicil.org](mailto:frontdesk@nicil.org) to request for a copy to be emailed to you. Enjoy!

## Introduction

**A bad attitude is like a flat tire. If you don't change it, you'll never go anywhere.**

*Unknown*

Of all of the steps to success in life, attitude, specifically a bad attitude, can be the biggest barrier to overcome. Thanks to social media, we live in a world governed by perception instead of fact. This unfortunately adds to the attitudinal barriers that our society faces every day. Trying to interpret or decipher an expressed attitude creates a multitude of misunderstandings. Add a disability or multiple disabilities to the mix and that seems to exponentially increase the attitudinal barriers that must be overcome in order to achieve your goals.

Northwestern Illinois Center for Independent Living (NICIL) supports people with disabilities to live their independent lives as they chose. Part of being independent is being able to move about; go to doctor appointments, go shopping, go to school, and go visit family or friends. NICIL has put together this guide to help the citizens of our five-county service area: Carroll, Jo Daviess, Lee, Ogle and Whiteside Counties, understand and be fully informed of their rights as related to accessibility

Unsure of how to interpret a conversation or situation, this guide may be able to help! We would be happy to assist you with this process! Contact NICIL today to schedule an appointment.

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## Definitions

There are often times that people use language (slang or abbreviations) that may not make any sense to those not familiar with that topic. In this section we want to take the time to identify some common terms that you may hear in regards to attitudinal barriers.

Attitude - is a settled way of thinking or feeling about someone or something, typically one that is reflected in a person's behavior

Family of Origin - refers to the significant caretakers and siblings that a person grows up with, or the first social group a person belongs to, which is often a person's biological family or an adoptive family. Our early experiences have a major influence on how we see ourselves, others, and the world around us. Family of Origin can impact how we cope and function in our daily lives.

Ethnic Culture - is a behavior of a specific society. Culture is defined by society norms formed over the years, their way of living, specific aspects of their life and, as a result, in their customs.

Ableism - is discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities.

Attitude of Gratitude - means making it a habit to express thankfulness and appreciation in all parts of your life, on a regular basis, for both the big and small things alike.

Advocacy – the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal: public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.

Interpretation - the act of explaining, reframing, or otherwise showing your own understanding of something. Often times a person's interpretation is based on their Family of Origin and / or cultural influence.

## The Unseen Barrier

Attitudinal Barriers are negative perceptions and value systems that focus on a person's diagnosis or disability rather than their abilities and other valued characteristics. Attitudinal barriers may be present in societies, communities, or in specific individuals and generally surface in the form of exclusion or condescension.

Most often, attitudinal barriers are a result of misunderstanding, miscommunication, or lack of education or information. The person or entity that is presenting or possessing the attitudinal barrier is generally not doing so in malice, but due to not fully understanding the person or the situation at hand. Although all of us have experienced an attitudinal barrier at some point in our life, people with disabilities are faced with these barriers every day. Some examples of attitudinal barriers are:

- Ignorance
- Inferiority
- Pity

- Stereotypes
- Fear
- Denial

This list is far from exclusive, but it paints a picture of the types of barriers that are created by a person's attitude.

There are many outside factors that can contribute to negative attitude or the interpretation of a negative attitude. Some of these factors include:

- Family of Origin
- Ethnic Culture
- Circle of Influence
- Faith
- Generation
- Education

These are just a few of the many outside factors that have influence a person's attitude, therefore, at times creating an attitudinal barrier. Unfortunately, attitudinal barriers create a much higher risk for discrimination than physical barriers because they are more discrete. A physical barrier is a visible roadblock to equality, attitudinal barriers tend to be more invisible. Here is where we can help!

In today's society, people with disabilities face an unseen barrier called Ableism. Ableism is a form of prejudice specifically against a person with a disability. This form of prejudice or discrimination tends to limit the potential of a person with a disability, whether it be for employment or general societal situations. Ableism is expressed in many forms, some of these are:

- Dehumanization
- Generalizing
- Disempowering
- Use of Oppressive Language
- Segregation
- Overprotection
- Exclusion

Attitudinal barriers are difficult enough to overcome, without additional prejudices due to a disability. For this reason, it is extremely important to interpret the situation accurately before acting.

### **Truth or Fiction – It's All in The Interpretation**

There are many things that can influence a person's interpretation of a situation and sometimes it is very easy to misinterpret a situation as an attitudinal barrier. That is where NICIL may be able to assist you. NICIL can assist consumers with situations in which an attitudinal barrier is suspected or present. The NICIL team will work with the consumer to review and assess the situation and offer options on addressing the

situation, specific to each consumer's circumstances. We can help you discern if a barrier is present, by guiding you through situation evaluation, which includes making sure that we focus on the language used, not just how the situation was presented. Even the best of news can sound negative if presented by someone having a bad day!

In most cases, should an attitudinal barrier be present, an advocacy effort is the best option for addressing the situation. NICIL will work with the consumer to identify any and all rights that may have been violated and determine the best method of communication that will begin the advocacy effort. Advocacy communication could be in person, via phone, mail, e-mail, amongst other communication methods. We will work with the consumer to identify the best method of communication as it applies to the individual situation. Depending on the specific situation, there may be many steps to this process, and NICIL would be honored to assist you!

**\*\*Please Note:** NICIL is not legal representation. Should your situation require legal assistance, NICIL will work to refer you to potentially free legal services that may be available to you.

## **Tips and Suggestions**

There are many tips and suggestions that the NICIL team can share through our years of experience here, years of experience in other positions, and as subject matter expertise. We have seen it all, heard it all, and could write a book! Actually, we are in the process of writing a book on Human Resource Practices for not for profit agencies now!

Here are our best tips and suggestions for interpreting your situation!

- ✓ Focus on what is being said, not how it is being said
- ✓ Don't assume you know what the other person is thinking – you are not a mind reader
- ✓ Listen actively
- ✓ Ask for clarification before making an assumption
- ✓ Have an attitude of gratitude – focus on the positive

## **Resources**

*Shout Out to Disabled People – Overcoming Ableism*, Dia Sutton, at [https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/handout\\_attitudinal\\_barriers.pdf](https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/handout_attitudinal_barriers.pdf)

*How to Have an Attitude of Gratitude*, Andrew Merle, at [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-to-have-an-attitude-of-gratitude\\_b\\_8644102](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/how-to-have-an-attitude-of-gratitude_b_8644102)

## Conclusion

There are so many factors that may influence our interpretation of a situation, and depending on outside factors these can even vary on a daily basis. This adds an additional attitudinal barrier to the situation. Getting enough sleep, not feeling well, even being hungry can influence our interpretation of a situation. NICIL is here to help you interpret the situation and, when necessary, provide guidance in addressing the attitudinal barrier. Call us today!

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