



## “I love my human rights” series:

# Lorie Sherritt's story

## Classroom conversation guide – Grades 7-9

### Introduction

This guide has been prepared to assist classrooms from grades 7 to 9 to explore themes in BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner's "I love my human rights" video series. The video series uses storytelling as a tool to help personalize complex human rights concepts and encourage empathy and action. In Lorie Sherritt's video, she shares the importance of self-advocacy and the right of people with intellectual disabilities to make decisions about their lives. The questions below are provided to explore the video's themes.

### To consider in planning the activity

These questions touch on subjects that may bring up difficult emotions for students who have experienced ableism, have family members or friends with disabilities or experience a similar injustice or disempowerment. You may wish to:

- Use some of the questions as journal prompts, so that students can reflect on them individually before discussing them.
- Think about ways to welcome, normalize and support self-regulation of a range of emotional reactions to Lorie's story, including emotions such as discomfort, fear, curiosity, or even superiority.
- Take some time while preparing for this activity to identify which of these questions should be omitted from the conversation or modified to avoid negatively impacting participants. Adapt these activities, questions and resources to meet the needs of the students you are working with.
- While preparing for this activity, consider identifying which of these questions could be omitted from the conversation or modified to avoid putting students at risk.
- Check in with students who may be uniquely impacted before the activity to let them know about the content and see how they feel about participating in the activity. Follow up with them after the activity and offer to connect them with the school counselor or other school or community-based supports if needed. Remember that there may be students who are impacted but who do not speak up for assistance. Information about the Kids Help Phone and other supports are provided in the Community Resource section.

### Getting started

The following are examples of steps that facilitators can take to help create space in which participants feel safe and comfortable to express themselves. Consider using these examples or others that are familiar to you:

1. Tell students that as humans we like to hear about other people's stories. We often make connections with these stories, which may cause us to experience similar feelings to the person in

the story, especially if their experience reminds us of something that has happened to us or someone we care about. If this happens, you can take a break or do something to take care of yourself. Help students identify together some methods of self care that are appropriate for your classroom, such as getting a drink of water, paying attention to your breathing, or taking a break.

2. Tell the group that everyone has a responsibility to create a space that is as safe as possible, especially for those students who may have or be close to similar experiences as those shared in the video. They will consider ways to do this through a community agreement.
3. Highlight that creating a safe space does not mean that the space will be comfortable for everyone. Some students may feel uncomfortable when they think about Lorie's and other peoples' experiences with ableism. Some examples of discomfort may be feeling embarrassed or ashamed for having been unaware of these experiences or having previously participated in discriminatory language or actions towards people with disabilities. It is okay and often helpful to feel uncomfortable in this way because it can help us to about what we can do to make things better. Consider introducing ideas of restorative justice such as accepting responsibility, building relationships, meaningful apologies and making amends.
4. The purpose of this discussion is to listen to and learn from one another. Ask participants to help develop a community agreement to create a space where people show mutual respect and listen attentively to what others share. Examples may include:
  - listening actively
  - being present
  - sharing only your own story
  - opening your mind to learning new ideas
  - showing gratitude when people share their experience
  - knowing you have the right not to share your story
  - respecting confidentiality

Once the community agreement is developed, the group can come up with ways to ensure that the guidelines are followed and respected. For more information about creating a community agreement, see [Safer space policy/Community Agreements: The Anti-Oppression Network](#).

5. Identify ways for everyone to participate and to be heard. For example, consider taking turns speaking around a circle or pausing from time to time to invite those who have not yet spoken to have the opportunity to contribute.
6. Take breaks. Go outside or stop for a movement break. Pause for snacks. Consider carrying out the conversation over several days.

## Concepts covered

In this video, Lorie shares the story of how she became a 'self-advocate'. Her story reflects the ongoing struggles many people with developmental and intellectual disabilities face in their fight for the right to live in community after BC closed large institutions, like Woodlands, in 1996. If students are not familiar with developmental and intellectual disabilities, institutionalization, and community living, allocate sufficient time to introduce them or provide opportunities for deeper learning. Resources on these topics are listed at the end of this conversation guide.

## Pre-viewing activity

1. Many of the positive changes in our society happen because people actively decide to work for change. Invite students to think about and/or share examples of instances where people have worked to change laws or practices that discriminate against certain groups of people? Give a few examples to get the list started.



2. Invite students to think about and/or share examples of some of the ways you show that you care for others? What are some of the things you might do for someone you care about (a family member, a friend, a community member, a teacher, or a neighbour). Give a few examples to get the list started. Invite students to reflect about responsibilities to care for each other.

## Viewing the video

Point out the closed captioning and transcript options to assist students in listening to Lorie's story.

## Open the conversation

Choose a few of these questions that will work with your students. Begin with questions that will ease students into the conversation in an emotionally safe manner.

- What did you think while watching the video?
- Did you find anything surprising in Lorie's story? Did you learn anything new?
- What feelings did you experience while watching the video?
- Were there some things in Lorie's video that you already knew about? What were they?
- Lorie describes herself as a 'self-advocate'. What does she mean by that?
- In the video, Lorie tells us about some childhood experiences that helped shape her decision to become a self-advocate. What were they?
- In the video, Lorie talks about an institution called Woodlands. Had you heard of Woodlands or institutions like it before? If not, were you surprised? How did learning about these institutions make you feel?

## Deepen the conversation

Choose a few of these questions that will work with your students.

- In the video, Lorie says that she had to take on a lot of responsibility at a very young age. However, caring for her family also made Lorie realize how powerful helping others can be. Do you think that difficult experiences can shape who we become as adults? How did these experiences shape Lorie's life?
- Lorie's story is about being a 'self-advocate.' What does that term mean to Lorie and to the people with disabilities who are part of BC People First, the organization she mentions in the video? Why is it so important for them to advocate for themselves?
- A big part of this video is about having the right to make decisions for yourself. Are there times when other people make decisions for you? What are those situations? How do you feel about making your own decisions? Do you think you might feel differently when you are an adult?
- In the film Lorie talks about BC People First, an organization that helps people with disabilities be self-advocates. She says, "We are here to make change." What kinds of change have Lorie and BC People First worked towards?
- Lorie describes herself as a 'self-advocate'. Have you ever thought of yourself as a self-advocate? Can you think of a time when you have been an advocate for yourself or someone else? Is there an issue that you would like to be an advocate about?
- In the video, Lorie talks about Woodlands, an institution where people with disabilities were sent to live, sometimes for their most of their lives, away from their home communities and families. How does Lorie describe the treatment of people with disabilities in these institutions? Why is it important to Lorie that the public to know about the abuse that happened at places like Woodlands?



- Most people have heard of racism or sexism, but they may not have heard of ableism. Ableism is a similar term that refers to treating people with disabilities differently in a harmful way, such as leaving them out or making it hard for them to be included. What are some examples of ableism mentioned in the film? Are there other examples of ableism that you've noticed or experienced?
- After watching this video, do you think there are ways that you might be able to speak out against ableism? What could you do or say to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities? (Can you think of specific examples for your class, school, or community?)
- In the video, Lorie talks about the right to learn how to do certain things, like cook or do laundry. Were you surprised by that? Are you learning to cook and do laundry? Why are these skills important for everyone to learn? Why do you think these skills are important to self-advocates?
- In BC, individuals who have experienced discrimination in employment, housing, or services (such as stores, restaurants or a doctor's office) can make a complaint to the BC Human Rights Tribunal. The largest number of complaints made to the Tribunal are made by people with disabilities. Why do you think this might be?

## Learning more

Choose from these questions and/or resources below to guide continued learning or discussion.

- From 1878 -1996, there were many institutions like Woodlands across BC. Had you heard of these institutions before watching the video? Do you know if your community had an institution like Woodlands? If you hadn't heard about these places, why do you think that is?
- In 1996, BC was the first province in Canada to close large institutions, like Woodlands, for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities. How was this decision made? What impact did it have on people with disabilities living in these institutions? Since 1996, have other provinces made similar decisions?
- Do you often hear about the experiences and stories of people with disabilities in books, films or on television? Do you think people with disabilities have many opportunities to share their experiences or tell their own stories to a wider audience? Why or why not? How can we make sure that we are listening to different perspectives and learning from people's stories?

## Bring the conversation to a close

- Summarize the key ideas in the discussion that reflect a recognition and commitment to protecting the human rights of people with disabilities.
- Invite students to revisit the pre-viewing activity.
  - 1) On the list that you made about people who have worked to change unjust laws or end discrimination, how many were working to end discrimination against people with disabilities? How many were people with disabilities? Why do you think this is?
  - 2) Lorie made the connection between caring for people and working to protect their human rights. Do you think that protecting people's human rights is a way that we can care for people? Do you think that we have a responsibility to care about and protect everybody's human rights?

## Resources

### To learn more about human rights and how they are protected in BC

- BCOHRC video: [What are human rights?](#)



- BCOHRC video: [B.C.'s human rights system](#)

**To learn more about human rights for people with intellectual disabilities:**

- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities \(video\)](#)
- [A right to housing for all: Ensuring a human rights approach inclusive of all persons with developmental disabilities \(report\)](#)

**To learn more about self-advocacy and supports for people with intellectual disabilities in BC**

- [BC People First](#)
- [Community Living BC \(website\)](#)
- [Inclusion BC \(website\)](#) and [Inclusion Canada \(website\)](#)

**To learn more about the history of institutionalization in BC:**

- [Truths of Institutionalization in Canada](#) .
- [Institutions and People with Intellectual Disabilities](#)
- [BC's Institutions](#)

**To learn more about ableism:**

- [Ableism 101: What it is, what it looks like, and what we can do to fix it](#)
- [Rewrite the rules - BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner \(bchumanrights.ca\)](#)

**Additional resources:**

- For support setting up a community agreement: [Safer space policy/Community Agreements: The Anti-Oppression Network](#)
- For text or phone support: [Kids Help Phone](#)

**To learn more about other people's stories about human rights**

- [Video series - BC's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner \(bchumanrights.ca\)](#)

