



“I love my human rights” series:

Lorie Sherritt's story

Conversation guide for youth and adults

Introduction

This guide has been prepared to assist communities, organizations, and Grade 10 -12 classrooms 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 people who have experienced ableism, have family members or friends with disabilities or have experienced similar disempowerment in their lives. You may wish to:

- Use some of the questions as journal prompts, so that participants 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.
- If possible, check in with participants 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. Remember that there may be participants who are impacted who do not speak up for assistance. Follow up with participants after the activity and provide connections to community-based supports. Information regarding supports is 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. Watching the video may raise challenging or unexpected emotions, especially for those who have experienced ableism, have family members or friends with disabilities, or have similar experiences of disempowerment and injustice. Ensure participants know they can take steps to ensure their wellbeing, such as stepping away temporarily, breathing techniques or grounding exercises. Tell the group that everyone has a responsibility to create a space that is as safe as possible, especially for those who may have or be close to similar experiences as those shared in the video.

2. Highlight that creating a safer space does not mean that the space will be comfortable for everyone. Discussing this video may lead to some discomfort for those learning about the history and experiences of people with intellectual disabilities in BC. Feeling discomfort when learning about injustices is to be expected. Prepare participants for these feelings and remind them that it's okay to feel this discomfort because it helps us reflect on attitudes and actions and contribute to positive change.
3. 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](#).

4. 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.
5. Share community resources that may be helpful.
6. Take breaks. Pause for tea, snacks, and movement breaks.

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 participants are not familiar with developmental and intellectual disabilities, institutionalization, and community living, consider allocating sufficient time to introduce them and/or provide opportunities for deeper learning. Resources on these topics are listed at the end of this conversation guide.

Pre-viewing activity

We all have human rights. Invite participants to brainstorm a list of human rights. Give a few examples to get the list started.

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 participants. Begin with questions that will ease them 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?
- In the video, Lorie describes herself as a 'self-advocate'. What did she mean by that? Why do you think that term is so important to her?



- Lorie tells us that some of her experiences as a child and teen were difficult for her. What were these experiences? How do you think they might have shaped Lorie’s dedication to human rights and becoming a self-advocate as an adult?

Deepen the conversation

Choose a few of these questions that will help the conversation to go deeper.

- Lorie describes self-advocacy as “people helping people.” What does self-advocacy mean to you? Do you ever advocate for yourself or others? Are there issues you would like to 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 so important to Lorie that the public know about the abuse that happened at places like Woodlands? What is the connection between public awareness and change?
- 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 the video, Lorie says that some people with disabilities might be afraid to speak up and become self-advocates. Why might they be afraid to speak up? Can speaking up together, as a group, help people feel less afraid to talk about their experiences of discrimination?
- People with disabilities are often the target of bullying and discrimination by people who are afraid of or uncomfortable with difference. How can these experiences of bullying and discrimination affect people with disabilities’ willingness to speak up and/ or become self-advocates?
- De-institutionalization, the process of getting people with disabilities out of institutions and into the community, is a big part of this video. Why do you think this process is so personally important to Lorie? Why is being able to choose where and with whom you live such an important human right?
- Ableism is a term that refers to discrimination against people with disabilities and describes how people with disabilities are left out or face barriers in our communities. What are some examples of ableism discussed in the video? Are there other forms of ableism that you have noticed or experienced in your own life?
- 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?
- We are all born with human rights, just by virtue of being human. Many of those rights are protected by law in BC. However, as Lorie’s video shows, sometimes people’s human rights are ignored or even denied. What responsibilities do we have to recognize, respect and protect other people’s human rights? How does ableism create conditions for people’s human rights to be denied?

Learning more

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

- 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?



- In 2002, people who had experienced abuse at institutions like Woodlands started their fight for compensation. Why do think it was important to them to receive compensation? Did they receive compensation? Do you think the compensation process was fair?
- What supports and services are available BC to help people with disabilities become self-advocates and fight for their rights like Lorie?
- Using the resources (videos and learning kit) provided below create a follow up conversation opportunity regarding the BC Human Rights Code. Ask participants to think about how the BC Human Rights Code intersects with the issues raised in Lorie’s video.

Bring the conversation to a close

- Invite participants to revisit the list of human rights they co-created as a pre-viewing activity. After watching the video, are any other human rights they would like to add to the list? Invite participants to identify which human rights Lorie and other self-advocates were fighting for.
- Summarize some key ideas and values that were shared in the discussion that reflect a recognition of and commitment to a human rights-based approach to disability issues.
- In the video, Lorie says, “We’re here to make change.” Invite participants to explore what this statement means to them and what kinds of changes are important to them. Have they learned anything from Lorie’s story about making change?

Further opportunities for learning

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

- BCOHRC video, Learner kit, and Educator Guide: [What are human rights?](#)
- BCOHRC video, Learner kit, and Educator Guide: [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)
- [Disability Alliance BC](#)

To learn more about the history of institutionalization in BC:

- [Truths of Institutionalization in Canada](#) (website)
- [Institutions and People with Intellectual Disabilities](#) (website and videos)
- [BC’s Institutions](#) (website and videos)

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 \(bchumanrights.ca\)](#)

To learn more about other people’s stories about human rights

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

