

Leadership and Mentoring Toolkit



Women
With
Disabilities
Australia
(WWDA)



Table of Contents

Women with Disabilities Australia _____	8	Leadership Principle	
Human rights _____	9	Challenging and transforming traditional	
About this toolkit _____	12	views of leadership _____	43
Who is the toolkit for? _____	13	Principle video	44
How was the toolkit developed? _____	14	Leanne’s story	49
How to use the toolkit _____	14	Key concepts	50
Glossary _____	16	Workbook activities	51
What is leadership? _____	22	Activity 1: I am a leader	51
Leadership qualities _____	28	Activity 2: Qualities of my leadership	53
A strength-based approach to leadership _____	37	Review	55
		Leadership Principle	
		Value diversity and lived experience _____	56
		Principle video	57
		Nadia’s story	64
		Ash’s story	65
		Key concepts	66
		Workbook activities	67
		Activity 1: My life story	67
		Review	69



Leadership principle	
Nothing about us without us _____	70
Principle video	71
Christa’s story	77
Key concepts	78
Workbook activities	79
Activity 1: Write a letter to yourself	79
Activity 2: Inclusive practices	80
Review	82
Leadership principle	
Lead by lifting others up _____	83
Principle video	84
Sally’s story	89
Key concepts	90
Workbook activities	91
Activity 1: Identifying strengths	91
Activity 2: Creating affirmations	93
Review	95

Leadership principle	
Care for self to care for community _____	96
Principle video	97
Charlie’s story	98
Key concepts	102
Workbook activities	104
Activity 1: Setting healthy boundaries	104
Activity 2: My self-care – part 1	107
Activity 3: My self-care – part 2	109
Review	112
Safe leadership _____	113

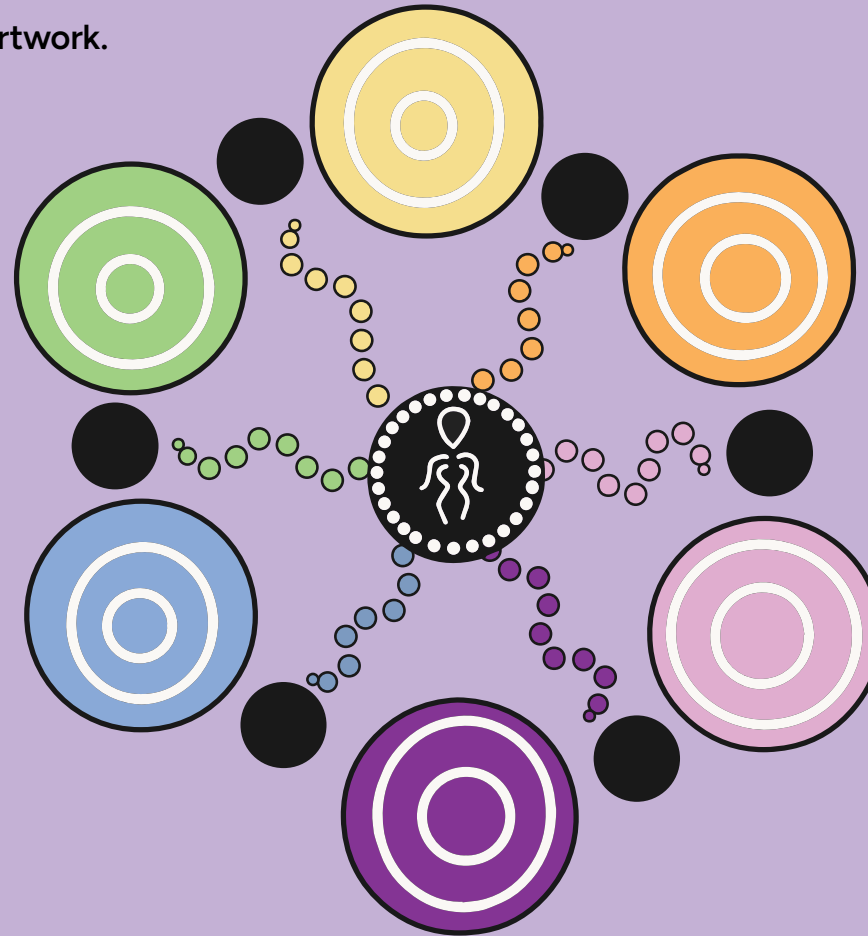


Mentoring	116
What is mentoring?	116
Why mentoring?	117
The role of mentors	119
What does a good mentoring relationship look like?	120
Creating a successful mentoring relationship	122
Alex's story	125
What are the benefits of being a mentor?	127
Sarah's story	128
Key learnings	129
Where to from here?	130
Workbook activities	131
Activity 1: Imposter syndrome and self-esteem journal	131
Review	133

Groups	134
Workbook activities	136
Activity 1: Group artwork	136
Review	138
References	139

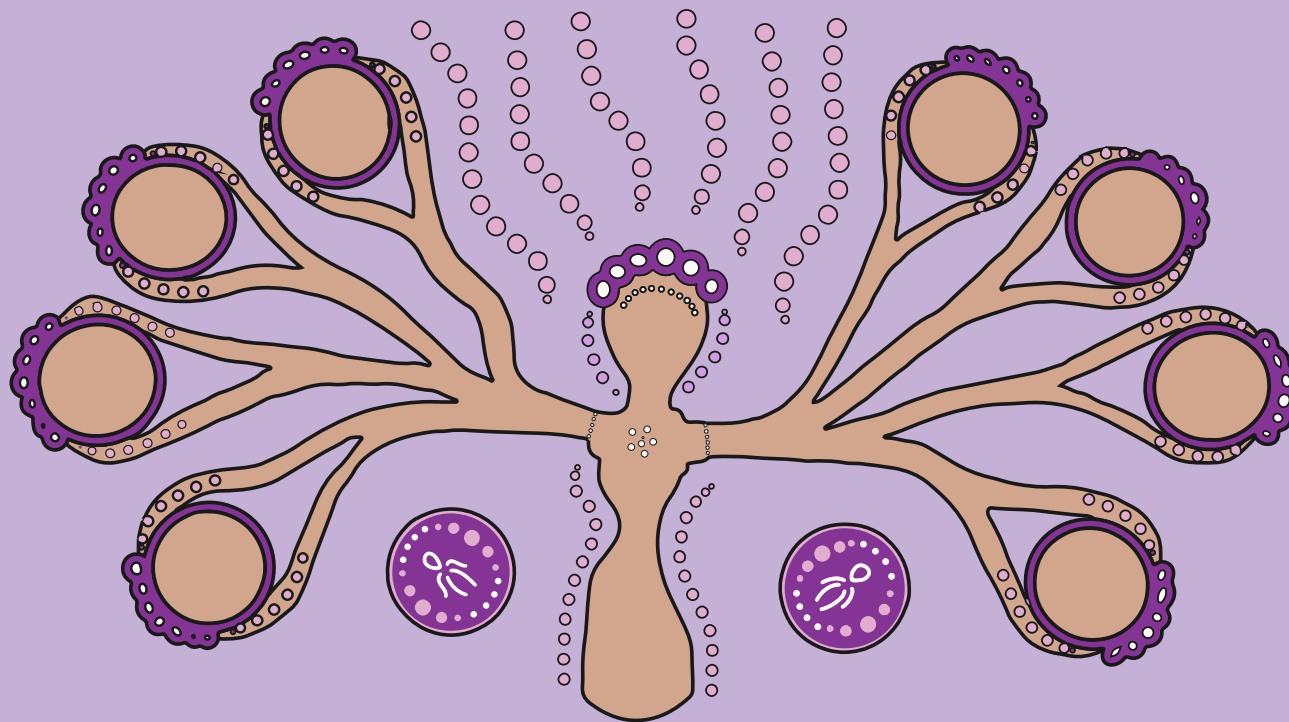


We were so fortunate to have First Nations artist Jannell Mongoo create two beautiful pieces of art for our toolkit. The design and the colours of the piece Woman Spirit inspired the colour palette of the toolkit and each leadership principle is linked to one of the colours featured in Jannell's artwork.



Piece 1: Woman Spirit

The Woman Spirit in the centre of the artwork is looking after and guiding the women around her. She is reaching out to them and wrapping around them to support and guide them on their journey.



Piece 2: Women Strength

We are all connected by the ground and Mother Earth. In this artwork, the Spirit Woman represents our feminine strength reaching out to support and guide each other. This links to the programs, connections, supports, and learnings offered in the WWDA community. It symbolises the grounding and strength of mother nature as a beautiful strong woman.

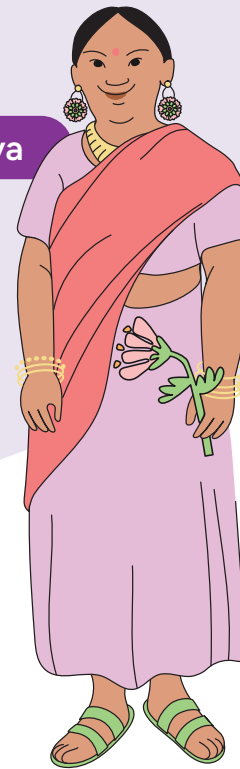
Meet some of our community...



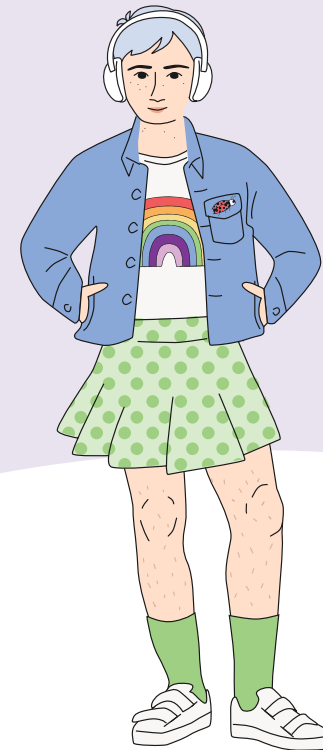
Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)



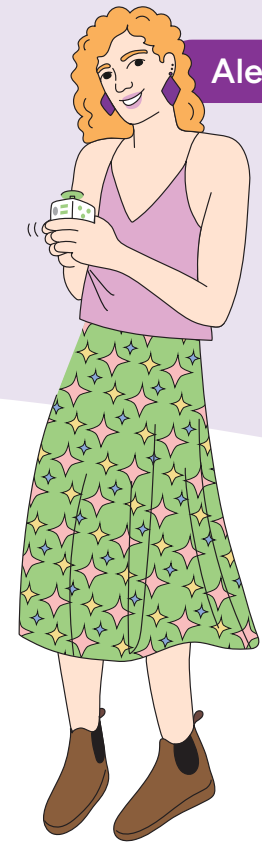
Asha



Priya



Ingrid



Alex

Kirra



Chloe



Lucia



Amina



Orana



Sylvia



Women With Disabilities Australia



Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is an organisation that represents women, girls and gender diverse people with disabilities in Australia. All our work is run by women, girls and gender diverse people with disabilities.

When we talk about women and girls, we mean anyone who identifies as a woman or girl, has lived some of their life as a woman or girl, or is treated by others as a woman or girl. In this toolkit we use the term women and gender diverse people with disabilities for ease of reading and community inclusivity.



Human rights

At **WWDA**, we work to protect and promote the **human rights** of women and gender diverse people with disabilities.

Everyone has human rights. These are the rights that every person has, simply because they are a person, to make sure that everyone is treated fairly.

Human rights are protected by international laws. These are the rules that different countries agree on together. Many different countries, including Australia, have agreed to laws around the rights of people with disabilities to make sure everyone in society is respected and protected.

For example, people with disabilities have the right to:

- be free from violence and abuse
- be protected by the law;
- have the same chances at work and in school as everyone else;
- be a part of the community; and
- make their own decisions.

These laws also talk about how important it is for women and gender diverse people with disabilities to build their confidence, knowledge and skills for participation in leadership.



Countries should take extra steps to support women and gender diverse people with disabilities to:

- be empowered;
- understand their rights; and
- make their own decisions.

All people with disabilities have a right to:

- be part of their community;
- share their ideas and experiences; and
- make decisions about the things that are important to them.



Leadership, self-advocacy and rights

The voices and leadership of women and gender diverse people with disabilities are essential for an inclusive and equitable society. Training and supports to learn about leadership can assist people in developing the confidence and understanding to speak out and stand up for the things they care about. Peer groups and self-advocacy groups can support people to continue to build their skills to speak up about their rights and share their voices and take action.



Leadership training can also support people to gain skills and confidence about making their own decisions.

The decisions and choices that we make let us express what we think, what we want, and what matters to us. The outcomes of our choices and decisions can be good and bad, and it is these outcomes that help us to learn and gain experience, confidence, and knowledge. WWDA believes that all women and gender diverse people with disabilities have the right to make their own decisions and choices, and to receive support for decision-making if they need it. These choices can include small choices about what to eat and what to wear, to more important life

choices, like where to live or whether to have a family.

Everyone, regardless of disability, has a right to make important decisions and to get the help and support they need to do that. This is how it should always be! Some women and gender diverse people with disabilities might need support to fully understand the different outcomes of possible decisions and what those decisions mean, in order to make a decision that works best for them.

Being able to make our own decisions also allows us to be a part of our communities in the same way that everyone else is. Everyone has a right to be a part of the community.

This can look like:

- being involved in a community event or social club;
- having a job;
- voting;
- having a say about important topics;
- going to school, work or to the doctor; and
- being involved in the decisions that impact our lives.



You can read more about human rights in [WWDA's Human Rights Toolkit](#)



You can also access the [Easy Read version of our human rights information by clicking](#)



About this toolkit



Welcome to the WWDA LEAD Leadership and Mentoring Toolkit. The aim of this toolkit is to support women and gender diverse people with disabilities to build their confidence, skills, and knowledge in leadership. The topics in this toolkit will explore what being a leader can look like and the skills that may be needed. You will have the opportunity to explore leadership in the context of your individual strengths and in areas you would like to learn about further.

We know that people with disabilities are often excluded from participating in the community, and rarely see themselves in leadership roles. This toolkit was made to support women and gender diverse people with disabilities in their leadership journeys. It was made to support women and gender diverse people with disabilities to act on things that matter to them and build confidence and independence. Remember, everyone has a right to be a part of the community, make their own decisions, and have a say.



Who is the toolkit for?

This toolkit is for women and gender diverse people with disabilities. We hope that women and gender diverse people with disabilities throughout Australia, will use this toolkit in whatever capacity applies to them, to help advocate for themselves and others in leadership roles. This version of the toolkit is written in plain English. An **Easy Read version of the toolkit** is available on the website.



How was the toolkit developed?

The last time WWDA published a Leadership and Mentoring Toolkit was in 2000! Our LEAD Project team has worked closely in co-design and co-production with women and gender diverse people with disabilities, to inform an updated and more accessible version of the Leadership and Mentoring Toolkit.



How to use the toolkit

The toolkit is made up of information and activities. The idea for the toolkit is that you read the information and then take part in the activities. Using the toolkit in this way, means that you will build on your knowledge and skills in leadership.

You will find:

- information about leadership and what it means to women and gender diverse people with disabilities.
- WWDA LEAD's five leadership principles.
- information on mentoring and groups.
- self-paced activities focused on developing leadership skills, confidence and knowledge that can be done on your own or in a group.



Content warning: Some content and links in this toolkit may trigger difficult feelings for you. You will see this picture before any content that may be distressing.

If you need help, call:

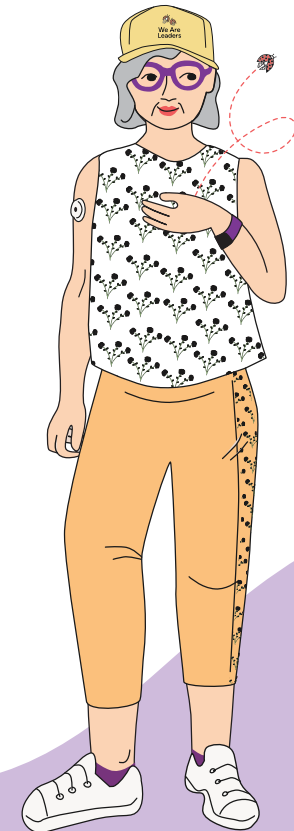
- 1800 RESPECT 1800 737 732
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Qlife General information line 1800 184 527
- 13 YARN 13 92 76



For more information on other helpline numbers in your state or territory, please visit:



<https://www.neve-plainenglish.wwda.org.au/level-4-page/helpline-directory>



Glossary



This page will help if you've found a word you don't understand in the toolkit. Here, we explain words we use that many people don't know. We've arranged the words in alphabetical order. Words that start with "A" come first, then the words that begin with "B", "C", and so on.



Accessibility means everyone can easily go to a place, use a service or get information. If something is accessible, people with disabilities can use it just like anyone else. Accessibility is a way to make things fair. It means people don't miss out because they have a disability. They get to join in, have a say and have their needs met.

Activism is taking action to support or change important social or political issues. Actions might include challenging people in power to improve human rights.

Advocate is someone who supports or speaks up for people. They help make sure people's needs are met and their voices are heard.

Affirmations are kind, positive things that you say about yourself. Things like:

- "I can do this."
- "I'm worthy of love and respect."
- "What I need and want matters."
- "I am good enough."

AAC Device refers to an **A**ugmentative and **A**lternative **C**ommunication device, which is a tool that allows people to communicate without speaking verbally. It can be its own device, or on a tablet or a laptop. People can choose pictures or words to express what they want to say.



Boundaries are rules we set for how we want other people to treat us. Boundaries help us to put our needs first and teach others how to respect our needs. They can be about touch, like saying no to hugging. They can also be about words, like saying no to insults or yelling. When we have boundaries, we say what we won't do or let others do to us. Setting boundaries can feel difficult, but it can help us be healthy and happy.

CEO (Chief Executive Officer) is the highest ranked employee of a business or organisation. They make big decisions, set goals, and manage how the company or organisation runs.

Co-design involves working together with people to create or plan something, like a project or product. Everyone involved shares their ideas and helps shape the final design to make sure it meets everyone's needs. Working in co-design helps to make sure that the people who the project or product is for, are involved in the design and planning of it.

Co-production involves working together with people to produce work because of the person's technical skills or subject matter expertise. It involves working together with people who have lived experience. Working in co-production helps to make sure that the people who the project or product is for, are involved in the creation and production of it.

Core values are the main beliefs or principles that are very important to a person or group. They guide how people behave and make decisions.

Cultural background means the cultures, practices, traditions and values you grow up with and share with others in your community or family. It includes things like your family's history, the languages you speak, the holidays you celebrate, and the way you live your life. It helps shape who you are and how you see the world.





Disabilities affect our minds or bodies, like how we move, think, see, hear or learn. People with disabilities might need extra support with these things. Disability is not just about what a person can or cannot do; it's also about how society is set up. When places, information, or attitudes aren't accessible to everyone, it creates barriers for people with disabilities. Everyone has the right to be included and to have the same opportunities, regardless of any differences they might have. Disability is a part of diversity.

Discrimination is when a person or organisation mistreats others because of who they are. They might discriminate against women, people with a different skin colour, or people with disabilities. It is unfair and against the law. Here are some examples of discrimination:

- People ignore your ideas at work because you are a woman.
- You can't get into a shop because you use a wheelchair and the building doesn't have a ramp.

Diversity is about the differences in a group. It includes things like the different genders, abilities, backgrounds, families, and cultures people have. We don't all have to be the same, but things should be fair. Variety makes life interesting!

Ethnicity is the group of people you belong to based on shared culture, language, and beliefs. It includes things like your family traditions and ways of life.

Gender is different to biological sex, which is about physical things like having a penis or vagina. Gender can change. If someone tells you their gender, respect that. The most common genders are woman/girl and man/boy, but many others exist.





Gender identity is a person's sense of their gender. It may be different from the way people described them at birth or describe them still. It's how someone sees themselves and how they feel comfortable. Someone's gender could be:

- Man/boy
- Woman/girl
- Both man/boy and woman/girl
- Neither man/boy or woman/girl
- Another gender entirely.

Gender-diverse people might not see themselves as either a woman/girl or a man/boy.

GPS stands for **Global Positioning System** which is a system that uses signals from satellites in space to help you find your location on Earth. It helps you know where you are and can give directions to help you get to where you want to go.

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that allow us to live decent lives. Rights say what you are allowed to be, do, or have. Everyone has human rights, regardless of ability, race, colour, gender, religion, income or cultural background. No one can take away your rights.



LEAD is a WWDA project that stands for Lead, Engage, Activate, Drive. The LEAD Project aims to promote and advance the leadership, agency, autonomy, human rights and freedoms of women, girls and gender-diverse people with disabilities.

Morale is the feeling of commitment and confidence people have about a task or situation.

Prejudice is having a negative or unfair opinion about someone because of who they are, like if the person has a disability, or their race, gender, or where they come from. It's when you judge people without knowing them or giving them a fair chance.

Race is a way to describe different groups of people who share similar physical traits such as skin colour, facial features and hair types.

Self-care means looking after yourself and taking time to do something that makes you feel good. Examples include having a cup of tea, watching a movie, talking to a friend, and taking a bath. You should do what feels good to you!

Self-worth is the feeling that you are valuable and important just as you are. It's about believing in your own worth and recognising your own value.

Sexual Orientation is about who you are attracted to. It means who you feel a romantic, physical or emotional connection with, like if you are attracted to people of the same gender, the opposite gender, a different gender, or both. It's a part of who you are and who you might want to be with.

Stereotype is an idea about a group of people that is often wrong. It's when you assume that everyone in that group is the same or has certain traits, even if it's not true. For example, thinking that all people from a certain place act the same way is a stereotype.

Strength based is focusing on what people do well and building on their skills. Instead of just looking at problems or what needs fixing, it's about using and developing a person's existing skills and talents.

Traditional refers to ways of doing things that have been followed for a long time, based on practices passed down through generations.

Wellbeing is a positive way of existing in the world. It means you are healthy and content and have good connections with friends, family and community. If you feel good about yourself and your life, you have wellbeing.



Women and gender-diverse people.

WWDA is run by and for women, girls, feminine-identifying and non-binary people with disabilities. When we talk about “women and gender-diverse people,” that’s what we mean. If these terms are meaningful to you, this toolkit is for you.

WWDA stands for **Women With Disabilities Australia** an organisation advocating for the rights of women, girls and gender-diverse people with disabilities across Australia.



What is leadership?



What comes to mind when you think about leadership?

It's a common term, but it can be hard to break down what it really looks like. When you hear the word leadership, you might think of the governing body of a country or a local council, but does that describe what leadership is?

What about when you think of a leader? Maybe you imagine a company CEO or a supervisor in your workplace, but again, that describes who might be a leader, not what being a leader means.



'Great leaders are those who have a strong influence without standing at the front of a crowd.'

Kate – WWDA Member



Let's take it one step back and think about the word lead:

'...to guide on a way, especially by going in advance'.¹

Here, lead is described as a guide – maybe the pathfinder or advisor – the one who marches ahead, showing others the way. This is important to remember when we're looking at how to understand leadership and leaders. It reminds us that leadership isn't just being the one in charge; it's helping others to navigate how to go forward. It's saying, 'follow me and we'll get there together'. Consider it like a GPS in life's journey, helping everyone find their way.

Leadership isn't wearing a suit or sitting in an office. Leaders are the amazing people you encounter in school, at home, at work, out in the community or even on the internet. They might not have a leadership title or position, but they're taking on leadership roles and modelling how to make a difference.

Have you ever spent time with children? Are you a parent, an older sibling, an extended family member, or do you work or volunteer in child-related fields? You might think it's an odd question, but we promise it's not!

Being around children, especially young ones, comes with many situations that require you to lead – and it's a perfect example of how leadership could be showing up as part of your normal day. It might look like showing a child how to wash their hands, how to look both ways before crossing a street, how to play a game, or how to say a word. You're offering guidance and support as you work together to achieve a goal.



Let's have a look at some other everyday examples of leaders and leadership.

Family members and supporters

Have you ever considered your family members or other people that support you as leaders? It may be a parent, caregiver, aunty or big sister guiding you, teaching you, and helping you become the awesome person that you are today. It's leadership at its most personal. Remember, you don't have to be related to someone to consider them family.

Friends

Do you have friends you admire and look up to? You might have a friend who taught you something new or supported you when you were having a hard time. Maybe sometimes you're that friend!

These are all important moments where leadership is shown whether you are:

- organising a catchup;
- showing a friend how to use a computer program; or
- helping someone when emotions are high.





Teachers

Think about your favourite teacher, from now or in the past. This can be from any experience where you learnt something new. What did they teach you? Teachers can be some of our biggest influences throughout our lives. They can inspire us, help us develop and show us new ways of thinking. They can (and often do) support us and teach life lessons that stick long after we have moved on to new things.

Neighbours and community

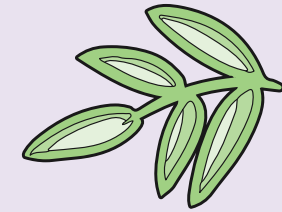
Your neighbourhood and community might have different leaders. Leaders can be quiet or loud. They might organise street parties, help newcomers feel welcome, or speak up for local issues. They may be someone who quietly picks up rubbish on the beach each weekend. They may or may not be elected officials, are often motivated, decisive, and compassionate. They show they care for the people and environment around them through their leadership.

Social media

Social media isn't just for memes and cat videos. There are leaders out there – thought leaders, influencers, and many more – who often start conversations and shape opinions. They're leading in the virtual world and advocating for change in our digital age.



Reflection time:



What are some everyday situations where you show leadership? How often do these situations happen?

If you can't think of any situations now, are there ways you could practice your leadership skills in the future? How could you do this?

How would you describe an ideal leader? What characteristics makes a leader ideal?





Where do you currently practice your leadership?

Having explored some everyday leaders and leadership scenarios, we hope your mind is busy considering the many times you have already displayed leadership. Are you able to list a few?

Leadership qualities



Now that we have a broader understanding of leadership, let's take a closer look at the qualities and skills that leaders display and why they're needed. As we go through, keep in mind that just like there are different types of leaders, the leadership skills required will vary with the specific needs of a group or situation. No one leader will have all of these skills or qualities.

Remember, you have the right to be a leader in your community, just as much as anyone else! Also remember that leadership can look very different for different people. Some people will need support in some of these areas, but that does not mean they can't be good leaders. Good leaders are always learning.



"Leaders come in all shapes and sizes. We can have a disability and be a powerful speaker, an innovator, someone who is transformative- just by being themselves."

Leanne Claussen –
WWDA Member

In no specific order of importance, let's go through the list!

Communication

Communication is important for understanding and working with others. We need to be able to communicate our thoughts and intentions and listen well to the thoughts and ideas of others.

There are many ways to communicate. This can be verbal, non-verbal, visual, written, and more! Some people will need assistance to help them communicate. For example, some leaders might communicate using their voice or using sign language, and other leaders might use communication tools, such as AAC devices. Communication

doesn't need to look or sound a certain way, and we may use a combination of communication approaches every day.

Fatima is a Deaf woman and has led a meeting to plan a fundraising event. Fatima prefers to communicate via email only and she shared this with the fundraising committee. Everyone was happy to share their ideas and contribute this way. On the day the committee was setting up the fundraising event, one of the committee members used their AAC device to ask questions so that everyone knew their role for the event. Together, they

successfully created a fundraising event that included a variety of perspectives and ideas from the group. Fatima demonstrated that discussing her needs allowed her to bring her full self to the role.



Planning

Having a plan means having a clear picture of where you want to go and how you'll get there. It's like having directions on a map – it helps keep you focused on your goal. When a leader can describe the bigger picture, they can use it to guide people. Planning can make sure we are working towards shared goals. Sometimes, people need help so that they can plan.

Mimi's vision was to get a university degree. With a neurological disability, she knew she needed to identify strategies and make a plan to help her succeed. Mimi remained focused and used her strategies to reach her goal. Mimi showed that having a clear plan leads to success.

Being honest and trustworthy

Honesty, trustworthiness and consistency are all admirable qualities in a leader. Effective leaders help to guide people in the right direction.

For Lisa, being honest and trustworthy has meant making hard decisions. At times it has meant having difficult conversations with friends. While it might make her feel uncomfortable, she knows that being honest and trustworthy means trusting her gut and doing what she knows is right.



Confidence

Confidence, in both you and your leadership abilities, helps to build trust and morale in a group environment. When a leader shows confidence, others will feel comfortable and trust their leadership. A confident leader models confidence to others.

Mischa leads with confidence. They know it is important to speak up. They believe the more of us who do speak up, the easier it will be for others. They feel their lived experience of disability has helped them become a more confident and understanding leader. They look for opportunities to notice the strengths in others. This helps others to build their confidence and see themselves as leaders, like Mischa.

Being humble

On the flip side, it's important to acknowledge that we all have limitations. Being humble is invaluable and teaches others the same. It also helps us to learn from others and value their contributions. Reflecting on your own leadership style and the things that trigger difficult feelings for you allows you to be more understanding of others.

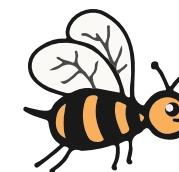
Karin knows she doesn't need to have all the answers in her role as a leader. She can call on the support and knowledge of the staff and volunteers around her. Humility and allowing others to help is a strength, as it takes a whole team to run an organisation well.

Vulnerability

Like confidence, being vulnerable can be a great strength. It not only helps to build trust and mutual understanding, but also shows that vulnerability is normal and can lead to better outcomes for everyone.

Sarah facilitates a weekly art class at her local library. During one session, she opened up to the group about her struggles with public transport, which often hinders her ability to attend meetings. By sharing the challenges she is experiencing openly, Sarah fostered a supportive environment where others could discuss the obstacles they were facing. Sarah's vulnerability helped to build trust and mutual understanding,

encouraging the group to brainstorm solutions together. Sarah's openness strengthened the connection in the group and highlighted the importance of shared support in building a resilient community.



Adaptability

Thinking creatively and being open to change helps lead the way even when things get tough. Change can be hard and sometimes it takes time to adapt. Showing your ability to adapt to a variety of situations can be a helpful aspect of leadership.

Mei used her experiences with chronic illness to inform her academic and career choices. Mei adapted her studies and work to accommodate her health needs. She was able to pursue her goals with resilience and by being open to the solutions that best suit her.

Caring

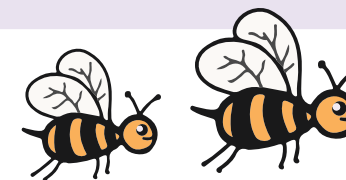
Caring about the perspectives of others is essential when you are a leader. It is about being compassionate and kind in all your communications with others. Building a positive and supportive environment by thinking of the needs of others will help to form strong relationships and boost motivation. Another outcome of a caring leader is that everyone feels safe to contribute their best.

Malika noticed a new member struggling to connect with others in a community group. She decided to start up a conversation, where they found shared interests. This helped the new

member to feel valued and included in the group. As a result, the group member started actively participating and formed connections with others in the group. Malika showed empathy by reaching out to the new member and helping them feel valued and comfortable in the group.

**'Alone we can do so little;
together we can do so much.'**

Helen Keller
(Author and advocate)

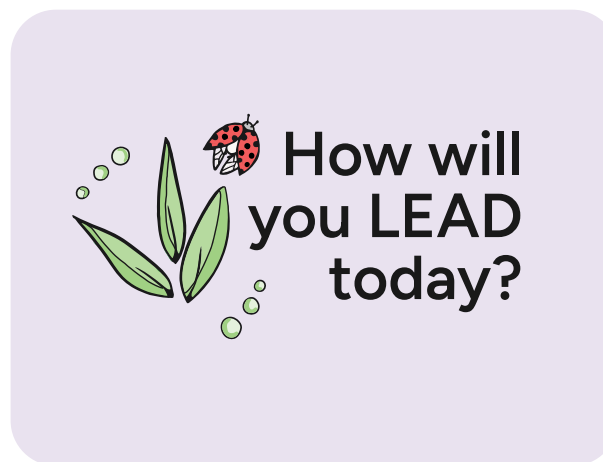


Taking responsibility

Taking responsibility for your actions and their consequences is an admirable trait in a leader. When you take responsibility, you accept and fix mistakes. This quality can also help teach others how to manage when things don't turn out how they hoped.

Maria helps in a community garden. She mistakenly ordered the wrong type of garden beds, which were too high for some wheelchair users. Realising the mistake, Maria took full responsibility and apologised to the community, before promptly ordering the correct garden beds.

By taking responsibility for the error and taking action to fix it, Maria demonstrated her responsibility to the community. Her approach not only resolved the issue but also strengthened the community's trust.



Resilience

Everyone experiences difficult times. Being a leader can sometimes mean facing tough situations and learning from mistakes. Showing strength and patience, while recognising the difficult times, encourages people to keep going and try again.

Amina knows there will always be harder times and a need for out-of-the-box thinking just to get by in everyday life. Her resilience and determination help her to keep going. She believes in showing that leaders come in all shapes and sizes. Amina knows that she is a powerful speaker and innovator. Disability doesn't change this and can even strengthen it.



Empowerment and motivation

When you empower and motivate others you are providing them with the courage and support to take on challenges and learn new things. You are encouraging them to be the best version of themselves.

Isabella regularly presents seminars to share her lived experience, aiming to educate others. Isabella empowers people through her talks. She motivates people in similar situations to embrace their abilities and pursue their dreams with determination.

Resolving conflict

We are all different and experience conflict at one time or another. Finding a solution that benefits everyone can help others learn how to resolve issues of their own. Everyone has different strengths and not all leaders need to be great at everything. If you feel there is an area that is not in your skill set right now, asking others who feel more confident is also a strength.

Jessica is helping to create a new sensory garden. Some members want quiet spaces for relaxation, while others want interactive areas for children. Jessica steps in to mediate the disagreement, considering both perspectives. She organises a meeting for everyone to share their views and suggests a compromise: designing the garden with distinct zones for both

relaxation and play. By facilitating open communication and finding a solution that meets everyone's needs, Jessica shows effective conflict resolving skills, role modelling to others the value of problem-solving and mutual respect.

It's important to remember that no one is perfect, and no one will be good at everything – and that is okay! There are still a lot of leadership qualities that haven't been included in this list. Good leadership involves ongoing learning, self-improvement, and the capacity to change.



Did you know that every time you speak up about your experience with disability, you could be acting as a leader, teaching others about disability and supporting the community? Remember, no one else is more qualified to speak about your experience of disability than you. Advocating for yourself is an important part of being a leader!



With all this in mind, you might be thinking, 'doesn't this mean anyone can be a leader'? The answer is yes! Leaders come in all shapes and sizes, and you encounter them every single day, even if the only person you are spending time with is yourself. It may seem daunting to consider yourself a leader, but it can be very simple. If you are supporting, guiding, or motivating others, then you are leading.

If you haven't had the chance to be a leader yet, that is okay too. Many people with disabilities are not given the same opportunities to lead as other people in the community. But remember, you have the right to speak up about your experiences and to be a leader.

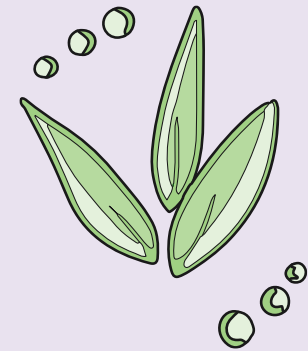
We hope that this toolkit can assist you to learn the skills that will help you lead in the future.

Each time you lead, you build your experience and provide a much-needed service to the person or people around you.

Leadership is an important part of human progress, as it allows us to work together to learn, achieve, and develop as both individuals and as a society.

You are a part of that!

Reflection time:



What do you think about leadership?

Have your thoughts on leadership changed?

Have your thoughts on yourself as a leader changed?



A strength-based approach to leadership



“The far greater challenge is to broaden the scope of leadership to include everyone’s strengths.”

WWDA Member

Have you heard of a strength-based approach? You might have come across the term if you have worked or volunteered at a community centre or attended therapy – but did you know it is also great in leadership? It’s a way of working with people (others and yourself) that focuses on what a person is good at and builds from those strengths.

A strength-based approach aims to recognise and nurture the best parts of a person, so they can try new things, grow, and succeed with confidence. This means that when you approach a task, you start with what you already know is within yours or someone else’s current knowledge and ability.



A strength-based approach also means seeing what we are less good at as 'areas for improvement or support' rather than weaknesses. This is far more effective in growing confidence and skills and often helps develop a can-do way of thinking. In fact, what we consider to be our weaknesses may become our greatest strengths as leaders.

For example, you might feel like you aren't a great public speaker because you get nervous. This means you can encourage and support others who feel the same, by sharing that you understand how they feel and that you get nervous too. You might also notice you feel nervous because you care about delivering an important message.

This means you may put more effort into writing and delivering the speech which is a strength. You might also take an iPad with you. This means that if you feel too nervous to speak, your iPad can read out your speech to support you to deliver your important message.

Here is a real-life example from a WWDA member:

A friend is feeling overwhelmed by her workload. A strength-based approach might look like the following:

Identify strengths

Your first move might be to think about her strengths and positive qualities. For example, maybe she is very organised, an excellent problem-solver,

and usually very good at remaining calm under pressure. Reminding her of her strengths is a great boost for her motivation.

Build from strengths

You might then suggest she take a step back and look at her workload again with these strengths and positive qualities in mind. Maybe she uses her problem-solving skills to prioritise tasks based on importance. Maybe she uses her organisational skills to break down larger projects into smaller steps.





Keep communication open

It's also a good idea to suggest she reach out again if she feels overwhelmed or needs more support. Sometimes when we are very involved in something, we need the people around us to point out what may seem like obvious answers!

Provide emotional support and encouragement

Never underestimate the value of emotional support. Providing non-judgemental support helps boost confidence and self-belief, which are big factors in becoming a more compassionate leader. You also need to take care of yourself. Sometimes providing emotional support can be difficult or overwhelming.

We will explore [safe leadership](#) in further detail later in this toolkit.

Offer practical support

You might also be able to offer your friend practical support based on your strengths and positive qualities. You might reduce workload stress by helping with specific tasks like proofreading or brainstorming. By offering support you are using actions as well as words to help your friend succeed.

In the section [Care for Self to Care for Community](#) we discuss the importance of looking after yourself to make sure the support you offer others considers your own needs.

Celebrate achievements and progress

Once your friend starts to tackle her workload, make sure to recognise and celebrate her achievements. Celebrating milestones helps to reflect on effort and process, which encourages motivation.

Using a strength-based approach empowers people to tap into their positive qualities, strengths and resources. In leadership, this approach fosters positive and empowering relationships built on mutual support, encouragement, and belief in each other's capabilities. People feel valued for what they bring to the table, and that can boost their confidence and skills as a leader.

It's also a bonus when working or participating in teams, as each member brings different strengths, and this diversity allows for the group to achieve more.

A strength-based approach focuses on identifying strengths, boosting confidence, building self-worth, and encouraging connection. Developing these skills and core values can help us to explore how living with disabilities can make us great leaders.

Next, we will explore the Leadership Principles in more depth and how they relate to being a leader as a women and gender diverse person with disabilities.



If you would like more information on strength-based approaches, visit Neve <https://www.neve-plainenglish.wwda.org.au> and sign up to the 'For professionals' hub.



Neve's Professional Development hub has a short course on strength-based approaches for women and gender diverse people with disabilities.



Reflection time:

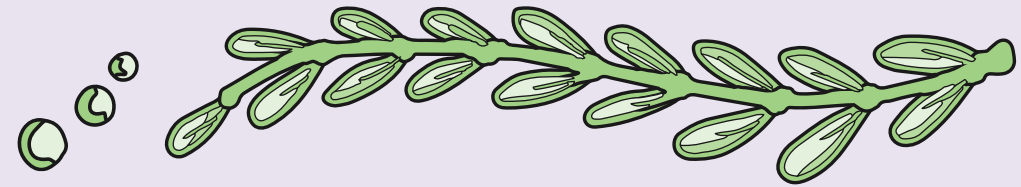


What are some of your strengths?

How has your identity as a women and gender diverse person with disabilities influenced your strengths?

How would you use them when taking on a leadership role?





How can we encourage other women and gender diverse people with disabilities to reflect on their strengths and use their strengths to build their leadership skills?

Recall and reflect on a time when you used a strength to find a solution or work towards a goal for yourself.

Leadership Principle

Challenging and transforming traditional views of leadership

"It's up to you to shine your light and be the leader that you were always meant to be."

WWDA Member



As with most ideas, leadership has changed over time. It can be hard to imagine what leadership looked like in the past or how it might look in the future. But that's one of humanity's strengths, we are in a constant cycle of learning, teaching and building. In this way, change is inevitable.

When you read the phrase '**challenging and transforming traditional views of leadership**', what comes to mind for you?

Principle video



Traditional leadership

To start with, let's go over what traditional views of leadership might mean. While reading, it's important to remember that the views of the time often shape the ideas. While some ideas no longer fit into our modern society, let's not overlook the parts that may positively contribute to leadership today.

Leadership has historically focused on power, where those with the most power have been seen as the most important and often make the most decisions, which in turn means they keep their power. Leaders have been expected to be decisive, assertive, and dominant, leading through command.

Transformational leadership

Transformational leadership is about recognising the value of diversity and working towards active inclusion. These leaders are encouraged and encourage others, to embrace differences in perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. Inclusive leadership is essential as diverse teams are more innovative, resilient, and open to change. Inclusive leadership is a great goal, but how do we achieve it?

Leadership balance

Both traditional and transformational leadership share common elements, like vision, communication, and resilience, and both styles have the potential to

inspire and motivate others. It is all about striking the right balance.

Traditional leadership may be better for structure, clarity and maintaining stability, but it can sometimes lack flexibility and inclusivity, making change more difficult and reducing creativity.

On the other hand, transformational leadership emphasises working together, being open to change and listening to the views of other people. It allows for leaders to build people up. Transformational leadership may make decision-making and accountability a bit harder, particularly if reaching an agreement that suits everyone is more important than taking action.



Sometimes people may use a combination of different leadership styles depending on the situation. Other people may have different leadership styles that work best for them.

People who use different leadership styles can benefit from learning from each other. It's also important to remember that no style will be perfect, or suitable for every occasion. By using the leadership style that works best for us, we allow for leadership that is more accessible, diverse, and reflective of our society.



Women and gender diverse people with disabilities learn many leadership skills through their lived experience. By creating spaces and opportunities that support their development of leadership, we are creating avenues for others to learn and benefit from that experience.

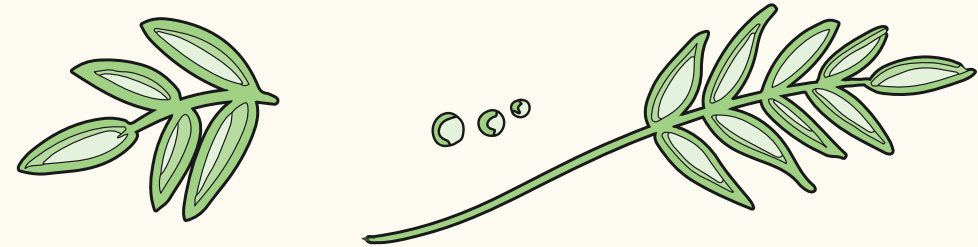
This can be achieved in so many ways, but it starts with noticing the everyday leadership in our lives; community volunteering, parenting, teaching, organising fundraising, and so much more.

Supporting women and gender diverse people with disabilities to develop their leadership is a perfect example of transformational leadership.

If you have one takeaway, we hope it's that leadership comes in all shapes and sizes. All types of leaders play an important role in shaping communities, organisations, and our society. By recognising the diverse talents and perspectives of different leaders, and continuing to both teach and learn, we can become stronger leaders, better navigate ongoing challenges and effect positive change in our world.



Reflection time:



What are some of your strengths?

What can you do to challenge and transform the traditional view of leadership?

Reflect on a time when you have seen someone take on a leadership role. It could be at school, at work, a sporting club, or in your friendship group. What was the situation?



What leadership qualities did you notice?

Why did you need, or choose, to lead?

Were there examples of a strength-based approach?

What leadership qualities did you use?

Reflect on a time when you took on a leadership role.

What factors and context did you consider?

What strengths were you using?



Leanne's story

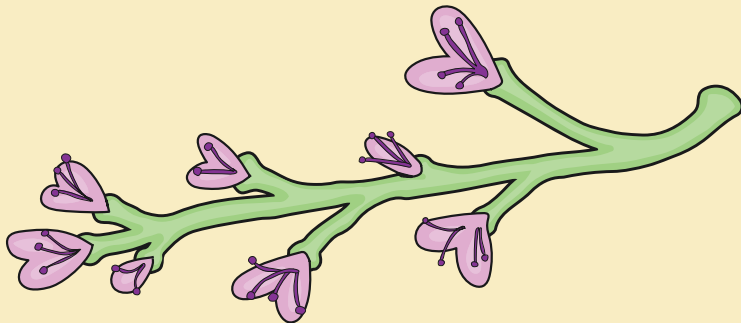
I'm a mum of six and a woman with a physical disability who lives in a bigger body. My disability, along with living in a bigger body, has presented many challenges along my journey.

When people see me, they sometimes assume I haven't been a CEO.

My disability didn't stop me! My passion for my work has been too great, too empowering to let this stop me.

People were and are willing to make changes when necessary, and we do need people to make these changes. It's important to ask for what you need, because you are the one they are coming to see. They want and need your lived experience. You don't realise how powerful you really are.

Becoming a leader in my field has taken many years but when I talk, people listen. I choose my words carefully. I listen more than I speak, and I make sure that I'm providing value. After talking to me, I want people to come away with something they will remember. It's also very important for me to teach these skills to others.



Key concepts

- It's important to keep in mind that society and what is seen as 'typical' affects how we see leadership.
- The traditional view of leadership focused on people in positions of authority and power who often led by giving instructions and keeping control.
- Transformational leadership is about seeing the value of the differences we all bring in perspective, background, and experience.
- Inclusive leadership is essential and diverse teams are more innovative, resilient, and open to change.
- Transformational leadership styles recognise leaders are everywhere and come in all shapes and sizes.
- We can challenge the historic, traditional leadership style to make room for inclusive transformational leadership style. For example, by supporting women and gender diverse people with disabilities to become leaders.



Workbook activities

Activity 1: I am a leader

Think of times when you have stepped into a leadership role as you complete the sentences below:

It can help to share this activity with others and discuss your experiences. Often others will think of something you didn't value as leadership, and you will realise some ways you have already been a leader.



1. I am a leader when I teach others about ...
e.g. How to pass on skills to children

2. I am a leader when I challenge stereotypes about ...
e.g. people with disabilities or older people.

3. I am a leader when I support and empower others by ...
e.g. identifying their strengths.

6. I am a leader when I speak out for others about ...
e.g. unfair decisions.

9. I am a leader because of my strength to ...
e.g. keep finding a solution even when it is difficult.

4. I am a leader when I celebrate mine and other people's achievements by...
e.g. creating special events to notice every small phase towards a goal.

7. I am a leader when I raise awareness about ...
e.g. how to build confidence in others.

10. I am a leader because I have achieved ...
e.g. some of my dreams and I continue to work towards other dreams every day.

5. I am a leader when I promote...
e.g. all the benefits of diversity in a team.

8. I am a leader when I am me because ...
e.g. I can role model the value of bringing my authentic self to decision making.

11. I am a leader with passion to ...
e.g. create a world where everyone has equal rights and opportunities.

Activity 2: Qualities of my leadership

Choose which leadership qualities you have and provide an example of when you have demonstrated this quality.

It is fine if some leadership qualities are left blank as this helps identify which qualities you may like to work on. Reflect on the qualities you feel are your strengths and those you want to continue to explore and build on. Remember, good leaders are always learning.

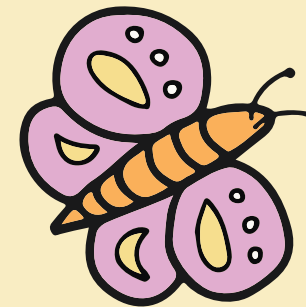
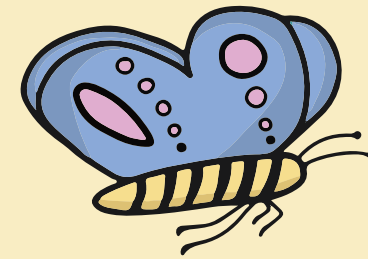


Leadership quality	Example
Communication	
Planning	
Honesty	
Confidence	
Caring	
Vulnerability	
Adaptability	
Understanding	
Taking responsibility	
Resilience	
Empowerment of others	
Resolving conflict	
Curiosity	
Kindness	

Review

The traditional view of leadership often focused on people in positions of authority and power like a CEO of a business. They often lead by giving instructions and keeping control. It's important to keep in mind that society can affect how we see leadership. Changing the historic view of leadership means recognising the importance of diversity and working towards inclusive action. New leadership styles welcome diversity, see the value in different perspectives and life experiences,

and recognise that leaders are everywhere in society. To bring about change, we must keep challenging traditional leadership styles and make room for inclusive leadership, like recognising the value women and gender diverse people with disabilities bring as leaders.



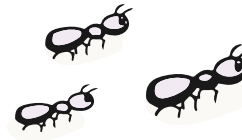
Leadership Principle

Value diversity and lived experience

“Feel the fear and do it anyway.”

Lisa Mabin – WWDA
Member





What do you think of when diversity and lived experience come up in conversation? Do you have a clear idea of what they mean to you, and what they represent? Both can bring great strengths, especially in leadership. Let's explore them in this principle!

Principle video



Values

As a starting point let's consider what it means to value something. Valuing something means noticing how it adds to our lives. This might mean that it brings us joy, happiness, or pleasure. It could also add to our lives in other ways, for example, we don't always enjoy learning new things, but it leaves us better off in the end. When we value something, we see its importance and how it enriches our world.

What are some things you value? What about diversity and lived experience? What exactly do we mean when we use these terms, and say they are something to be valued?

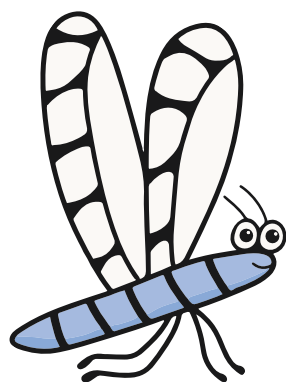
Diversity

Diversity can refer to the many differences found among and between people. These differences could be marked by:

- race,
- ethnicity,
- gender,
- sexual orientation,
- age,
- abilities,
- beliefs, and
- experiences.

Diversity is part of human society. All people and communities are different and unique. The diversity of our communities makes us stronger and helps us to understand things from

different perspectives. It is important to remember that we all have the same rights, no matter where we come from or what we look like. Respecting human rights means that everyone's differences are valued and that everyone has the right to equality and non-discrimination. Effective leaders create spaces of trust and respect for all people, and they encourage and respect the diverse experiences people bring to their communities.



Lived experience

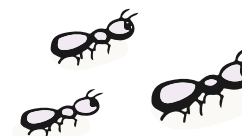
Lived experience is also a type of diversity. When we say lived experience, we refer to the sum of all your experiences, including your:

- upbringing;
- cultural background;
- education;
- work;
- relationships; and
- opportunities in life.

Lived experience is the unique knowledge, insights, and perspectives you build through your interactions simply by being you. No two people will have the same lived experience, regardless of their similarities. Lived experience is one of the biggest things that make you unique.

So why should we value diversity and lived experience?

No one person can imagine every possibility or come up with every potential idea. When we bring together people with different perspectives, we create a space that is vibrant with ideas and knowledge. This allows people to work together to imagine the many possibilities and ideas. Encouraging diversity allows us to benefit from that variety and shared effort. It promotes fairness, inclusivity and equity by valuing our differences. It also helps us to be more understanding of other people, which is essential for the community.



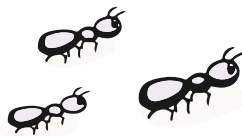
Valuing diversity and lived experience means that we don't make decisions without including the people whose lives they affect. We will explore this more in the next principle, ['nothing about us without us.'](#)

Valuing diversity enriches us, fosters understanding and helps to challenge stereotypes and prejudices.

Valuing lived experience recognises the importance of our unique knowledge and how that shapes our attitudes, values, behaviours and impressions of the world.

Lived experience in action

For example, if you've lived much of your life in a small community, you might think it is important to have access to healthcare and community services. Someone growing up in the city, however, might think it is important to have access to public transport instead. This shows how our own lived experience informs many things, including our priorities and our ideas.



WWDA member:

Being a person with a disability is sometimes hard and sometimes I wish I didn't have these issues. Then I think about my life and all that I've been through, and I know that by going through these things I'm now able to help others. If this hadn't happened to me, I might never have done all that I have done. I might never have been able to help all the people that I've helped since I started my journey.



WWDA Member:

I am so different in so many ways and it has taken me a long time to accept myself for who I am. I have recently started identifying as disabled and it has been so liberating to be accepted for who I am and have my lived experience respected. I have now had the confidence to join co-design committees where my lived experience has influenced the resources that have been made for other people with psychosocial disabilities.

WWDA Member:

I create tailored professional development courses for companies to use for their staff so that they can broaden their understanding of lived experience and diversity in the workplace. When I am creating these workshops, I always invite staff to come along and share their lived experience and diversity so that it helps to inform the workshop I am making for them.

WWDA Member:

I have a language processing disability which means that reading and writing can be difficult for me. I have a talent for presenting items in a way that makes them nice to look at and easy to choose from. When I was helping at an event for women, I showed leadership when setting out the donations area. I quickly worked out how the donations table should look. There were lots of different groups of items and it was important for people to see what was there. I gave the other helpers tasks to do that made the most of their strengths and were clearly explained. Everyone commented that the display looked like a fancy store, and really enjoyed looking through the items. I felt like I had done a great job and that the other women in the group had also done tasks that suited them best. This is a great example of the importance of valuing diversity.

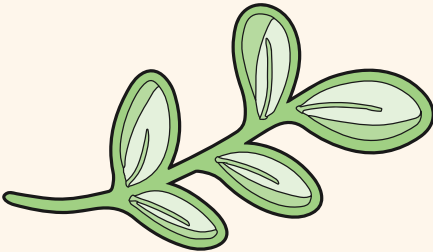


Lived experience in leadership

In leadership, valuing diversity and lived experience is crucial. It encourages inclusivity, and develops our abilities to work together, respect each other's strengths and understand different perspectives. It pushes us to embrace different ways of problem-solving and communicating. Leaders who value diversity and lived experience create environments where everyone feels valued, empowered, safe to be themselves and motivated to contribute.



Reflection time:



What makes you different from others around you?

What positives do these differences bring to you and the people around you?



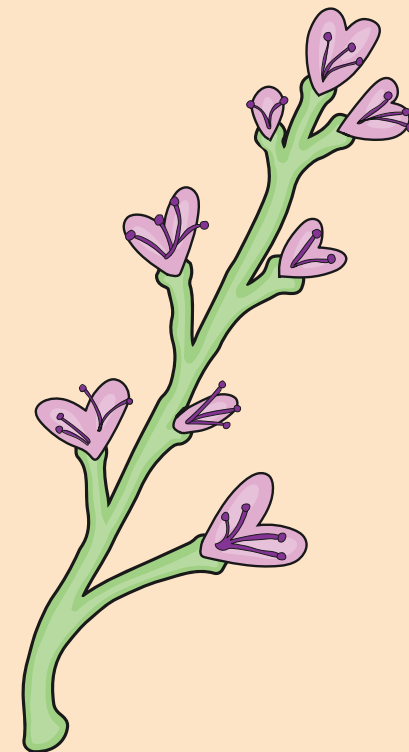


How does your lived experience inform your leadership?

Nadia's story

When organisations talk about disability leadership, often they mean a disabled person who can fit into the mould of doing the same work of an abled person. The far greater challenge is to broaden the scope of leadership to include everyone's strengths, skills and experiences. The WWDA staff who led LEAD groups like Peer Networking brought their own unique approach to the group while allowing individuals to shine.

Meeting so many diverse disabled women taught me a great deal about my community and myself. Sometimes I came to WWDA LEAD Peer Networking knowing nothing and learned so much from multiple perspectives. Other times I thought I already knew everything about a topic and when I listened, I found out there were so many people who knew things I hadn't considered. It was an opportunity to meet and talk to leaders from across Australia.

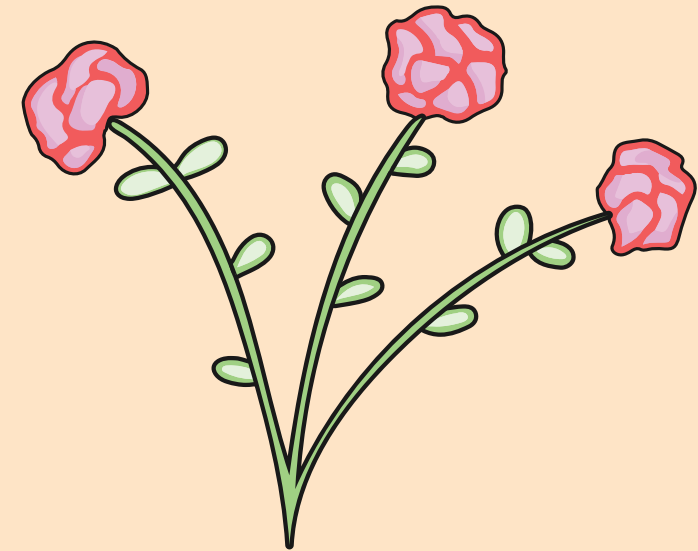


Ash's story

I use my lived experience to help others understand what issues people with a disability face in everyday life. I started applying for lived experience positions about five years ago. When I started out it was a bit scary. It's become something that I'm really proud of now and I actively seek out these roles.

There are so many ways that you can get involved. Google 'disability organisations' and see whether they

have anything coming up. Look out for lived experience positions on job sites. Check out places that you are interested in or places you attend as a person with a disability. A lot of organisations will reimburse you for your lived experience to make sure that their business is capturing diversity in all its forms.



Key concepts

- When we value something, we see its importance and how it enriches our world.
- There are many differences in people. Bringing people's differences together builds a stronger society.
- Lived experience means the knowledge, insights, and perspectives we bring to our interactions with others.
- We should value lived experience and diversity since different perspectives can create a variety of ideas and knowledge.
- We all have the same rights to participate in the community and have a say, no matter who we are, where we are from or what we look like.
- Leaders who value diversity and lived experience create environments where everyone feels valued, empowered, respected, safe and motivated to contribute.

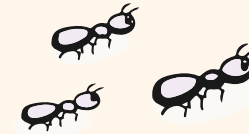


Workbook activities

Activity 1: My life story



Content warning – Exploring our life stories can bring up many feelings. We recall happy times but also hard and sad times. Before you write or create your life story ask someone you feel safe with if you can share with them any emotions that may arise. Feelings are not good or bad, they are all just feelings. To move through feelings, it can be helpful to have the support of a safe person.



Thinking about our life stories can help us find meaning and understand what makes us who we are.

When you tell your story, you can be as creative as you like. Celebrate who you are and how it has shaped you.

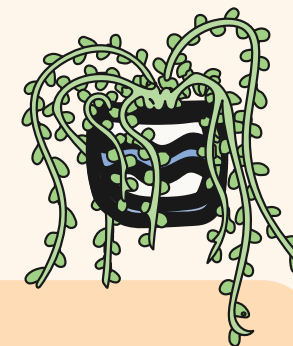
For example:

1. Write a short story;
2. create a collage or draw a picture; or
3. make a short video.

You can choose any way you prefer to create your story.

When creating your story, consider your past, present and future. It can also help to use a timeline.

Use these questions to guide you:



- What have you experienced in life that has been difficult?

- What are the good things that have happened in your life?

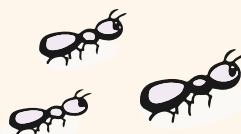
- Who is most important in your life and why?

- What do you love and how has this shaped your life and your decisions?

- What are your greatest achievements? What are you most proud of?

- How is your life now, different from your past?

- How will your future be different and how will you make it happen?



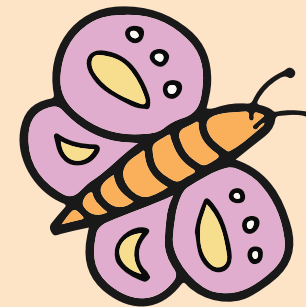
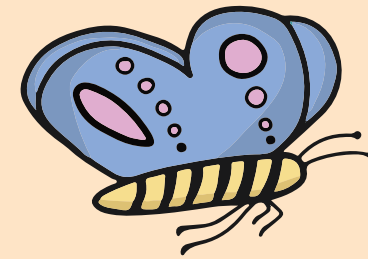
You can do this activity on your own, in pairs or with a group. Share your story with others you feel safe with, to learn more about everyone's different experiences. Ask questions to learn from each other.

Review

Valuing diversity means understanding its importance in our lives. It means recognising how important it is to have different kinds of people in a group, with different genders, ages, cultures, languages, beliefs, preferences and experiences.

Lived experience is your unique knowledge and perspective gained from your interactions with the world, shaping who we are. Even if two people are similar, their lived experiences will differ.

Recognising the importance of diversity and lived experiences is the start of inclusive leadership. It highlights the wealth of knowledge available when we work together and appreciate each other's differences and uniqueness.



Leadership Principle

“Don’t be afraid to speak up.
The more of us that do, the
easier it will be for others.”

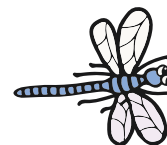
WWDA member

Nothing about us without us



Have you heard the phrase ‘nothing about us without us’? If you’ve spent time in advocacy or disability spaces, you may already be familiar with it. The phrase speaks to the importance of having a say in the issues that impact your life. It's about diverse participation in decision-making, to make sure that the people who will be affected by those decisions are part of the process.

[Principle video](#)



Advocacy

‘Nothing about us without us’ is a call to action!

For example, how would we know what a person needs if we don’t ask them? While we could make informed guesses, nothing is going to replace the perspective and knowledge gained through valuing someone’s lived experience. And that’s exactly what ‘nothing about us without us’ is saying. We need to value listening to those with first-hand experience to shape decisions for the best outcome.

Listening to people with lived experience is a must when making programs, laws and policies, as it ensures that outcomes are more

likely to be fair and effective. It’s also a right! Human rights law says that Governments need to make sure people with disabilities are involved in decisions that affect their lives. It is also important that Governments listen to a range of different people with disabilities about their experiences. Sometimes Governments focus on hearing from people who are easier to reach. This means that programs, laws and policies don’t always meet everyone’s needs. This needs to change.

The phrase and principle ‘nothing about us without us’ is essential to many different groups in the community, especially where decisions affect groups whose voices aren’t always heard.

Here are a few examples of groups that strive to voice the importance of ‘nothing about us without us’:

First Nations rights

People within First Nations communities often advocate for their right to a voice and participation in decisions that affect themselves, their traditional lands and their cultures.

Gender equality

People advocating for gender equality often push for equal representation and involvement in policy-making processes, for women, girls and gender diverse people.

Youth activism

Those within the youth activism space are equally invested in the need for youth input and participation in decisions that will not only affect them now, but also in the future.

Disability rights

People with disabilities often advocate for inclusive laws and Government decisions, and to make sure that Government consultation includes people with all disabilities and support needs.

Can you think of some other areas where this is important?

Outside of advocacy, there are many parts of life that can benefit from the spirit of ‘nothing about us without us.’

Here are some examples:

Community groups

Local residents are often involved in the planning and developments within their communities.

Social groups

Social groups are regularly guided by suggestions and opinions from all participating members.

Workplaces

Many employees advocate to have a say about workplace policies that affect them, like policies about the ability to work from home or accommodating part-time work.



Schools

Parents and students often have input into the policies and management decisions of their school, for example, uniforms, bullying policies or rules around technology.

Policies

Sometimes people take surveys or talk about their lived experience, to tell the Government what they need. This helps to make changes to Government policies.

While 'nothing about us without us' is important for decision-making, the benefits don't end there. As we looked at in previous principles, making sure people have a say in the decisions

affecting them is empowering and leads to better outcomes. When diverse voices are included, decisions are more creative, we foster stronger feelings of understanding and connection to self and community, and have services that work better for us.

Leadership

'Nothing about us without us' is also important in leadership. A leader who makes decisions with input from those affected is a leader who is inclusive and respectful. This goes hand in hand with 'challenging and transforming traditional views of leadership' and 'valuing diversity and lived experience'.

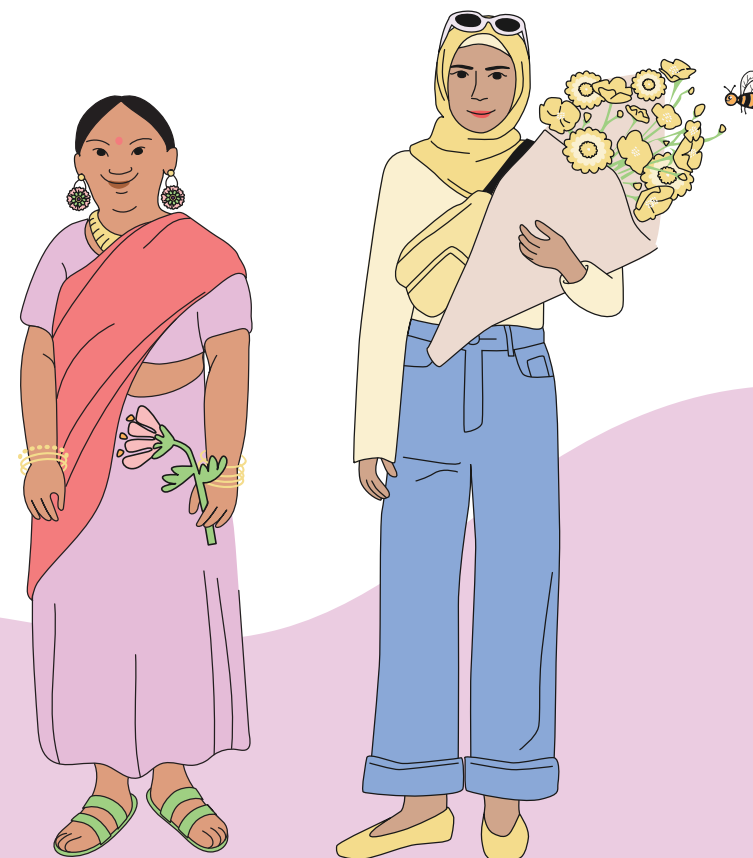
When leaders involve others in the decision-making process, they create solutions that truly work for everyone involved. Those involved will also be invested in making these solutions work, since they have been included in the creation process. It builds trust because people feel heard, appreciated and understood. In the end, 'nothing about us without us' leads to better, more sustainable results, and a more united and positive environment for all.



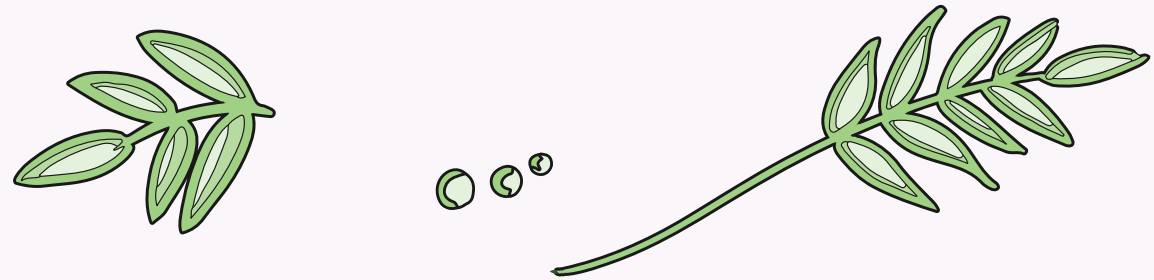
What can I do to share its importance?

Wondering how you might already be using this principle, or how you can do it more? Here's a few ideas!

- Educate yourself – learn about others. The more you learn, the better you will be able to see the many perspectives around you.
- Involve yourself where and when you can.
- Lead by example - advocate for yourself, and those around you.
- Share your story - nobody knows your situation better than you. You are the expert in your own experience of disability and the aspects of your own life.
- Support and encourage others to advocate.

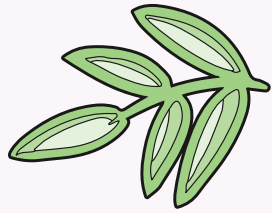


Reflection time:

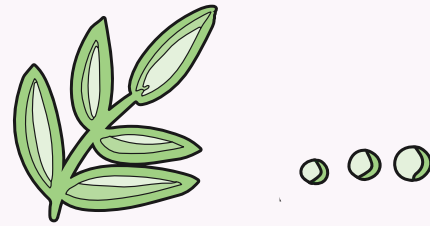


What does good listening look like?

How well does society listen to women and gender diverse people with disabilities? Consider cultural differences in listening as well as differing communication needs.



How do we highlight the voices of all women and gender diverse people with disabilities?



How do you already contribute and what do you need to change so your leadership is founded on 'nothing about us without us'?

How could you contribute in the future?



Christa's story

Years ago, I came across a quote from Shirley Chisholm: 'if they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair'. Shirley Chisholm was an African American woman who achieved many firsts in the US Legislature during the 1960's and '70's. Regardless of how you may feel about her politics, she was denied many seats at many tables – just like many of us.

I have carried her advice with me, and it has certainly served me well in the past, for example, when medical professionals are talking about me and not to me or when I become familiar with an issue that requires the input of someone with my lived experience.

Over the years I have learnt that bringing your own chair to the table is not the only way to achieve the outcome you are seeking.

Sometimes, you need to reach out to the head of the table and make a case for an invitation. Sometimes, you need find someone who already has a seat at the table to represent you and your needs. Sometimes the only thing to do is to sweep everything off the table, jump up on it, and dance your heart out so they have no option but to pay attention and listen to what you have to say.



Key concepts

- 'Nothing about us without us' is about the importance of including people in the decisions that affect their lives.
- People with different identities and experiences will have valuable first-hand knowledge and ideas to improve the outcomes of those decisions.
- Everyone deserves a voice and has the right to take part in decision-making, especially when those decisions may affect them.
- Women and gender diverse people with disabilities should be empowered and included in decisions that affect them.

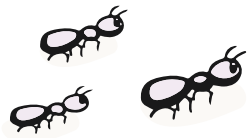


Workbook activities

Activity 1: Write a letter to yourself

Writing a letter to yourself is a good way to maintain accountability by expressing your goals and later reflecting on your progress and the commitments you have made to yourself.

Women and gender diverse people with disabilities have a right to have a voice about the issues that impact their lives.



Ask yourself: "What decisions are being made that impact my life? How can I get involved and create meaningful change?"

Now write a letter to yourself about what it might look like for you to represent the 'nothing about us without us' principle in your community. For example, taking part in local government advisory groups to provide advice on new policies or programs.

Revisit your letter in 12-months' time and reflect on your achievements. Remember to celebrate all progress, big and small.

Activity 2: Inclusive practices

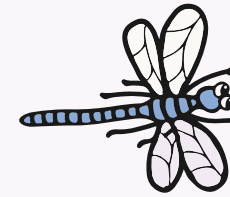
For women and gender diverse people with disabilities, there may be barriers to being included. Consider the statements below which are examples of leadership towards inclusive practices. Remember, inclusion is a shared responsibility. We have a right to be included, and a responsibility to include others.

Take time to reflect on the skills and leadership qualities each statement demonstrates.

These statements are just some of ways we may lead in including others. There are many more and you can add to these from your own experiences.

It is important you focus on the uniqueness of your own circumstances. If you don't see yourself in any of the statements we have come up with, remember we are all different and therefore have different priorities, interests, passions and daily demands on us.

Inclusive practice might look like setting an example for others by caring for self and resting when needed. We will explore more about the importance and value of self-care in the last principle in the toolkit.



If you are sharing this activity with others, discuss together and add some more statements that have demonstrated your problem-solving skills and determination.

When you are finished explore what we have learnt from this activity.

- What have you learnt from this activity?
- Were you surprised by anything?
- How can you apply your learnings here to your role as a leader?



1. I have participated in a group by contributing ideas and listening to others. For example, community groups, education classes, workplace.

2. I have provided constructive feedback on accessibility issues to organisations and/or businesses to help them understand specific barriers and how to address them.

3. I have participated in awareness events and/or campaigns that promote disability awareness and inclusivity.

4. I have shared my story and used my lived experience to educate others about the barriers people with disabilities face and ways to address these barriers.

5. I have joined or formed a community group that focuses on disability inclusion and accessibility.

6. I lead by example by demonstrating inclusive behaviour in all my interactions, setting a standard for others to follow.

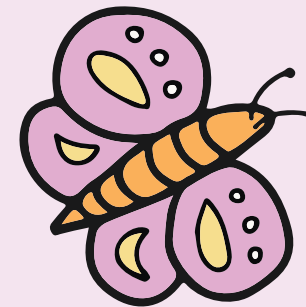
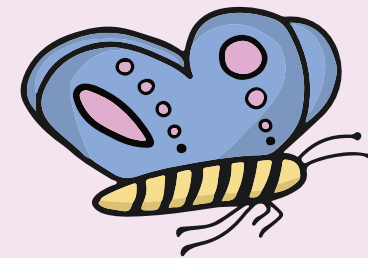
7. I have submitted a formal complaint to the relevant organisation or authority regarding discrimination or poor treatment, seeking appropriate action and meaningful change.

8. I have advocated for policy changes to develop or implement policies that promote accessibility, equality and inclusion.

9. I have provided my input on the design for products and/or services based on my lived experience and needs to ensure accessibility and inclusion.

Review

'Nothing about us without us' refers to the importance of including people in the decisions that impact their lives. After all, the people directly affected by a decision will have valuable knowledge and ideas to improve the outcomes of those decisions. Everyone has a right to take part in decisions that affect them. Women and gender diverse people with disabilities will continue to strive for a world where their participation is expected, and they no longer have to fight for it.



Leadership Principle

Lead by lifting others up

"I decided to reflect on my experiences and use them as a foundation to make positive changes for others."

WWDA member



Can you think of a time when you made it through something hard because of someone's support? It could have been a physical task – maybe you had a big garden job and a friend or family member came over to help. Or maybe you were having a hard time emotionally and someone offered their support with kind words and a listening ear.

Principle video



These are great examples of people in your life who are (perhaps unknowingly) leading by lifting others up. You might think, “aren’t they just ordinary things to do for someone you care about?” Of course. Helping someone we care about is often something we do without thinking. But think about how much an hour or a day of someone’s time can mean to you. It really helps to appreciate how important those actions are, big and small!

There are many ways in our everyday lives that we are supported by the people around us. They often help us achieve our goals and overcome hard times.

To ‘lead by lifting others up’ means supporting, encouraging, and valuing someone. It means helping them to grow into an even more amazing version of themselves.

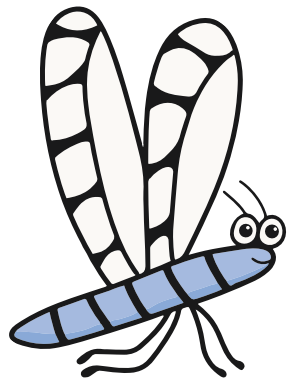
More than any of the principles we’ve explored so far, ‘lead by lifting others up’ shows how often we encounter everyday leadership; the type that you find within your community, within your family, within your friends, and within yourself.



Can you think of a time when you were the one leading by lifting others up?

There are so many big and small ways that we display and experience leading by lifting others up. Mentoring is a great example of this, and you can read more about this in the [mentoring section](#) of the toolkit.

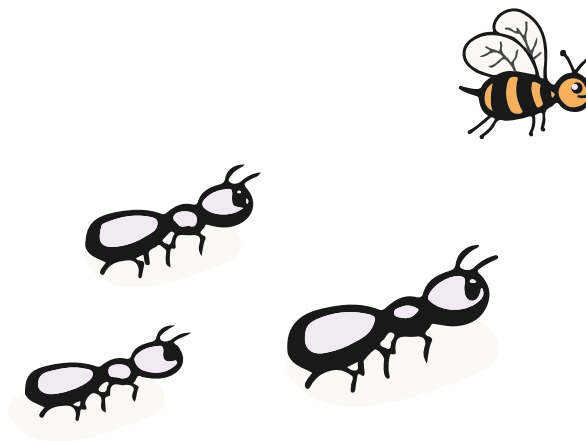
Let's explore a few more examples!



Emotionally

Some examples of lifting others up emotionally might include:

- Offering kind words to help boost confidence or morale
- Listening to problems without judgment
- Celebrating achievements, no matter their size
- Helping to problem-solve with a friend



Socially

Some examples of lifting others up socially might include:

- Reaching out to someone who appears to be feeling left out
- Inviting others to group activities
- Standing up for someone who has been treated unfairly
- Introducing people to new friends to help them settle in
- Spending time one on one with someone who doesn't enjoy going out in groups

Physically

Some examples of lifting others up physically might include:

- Helping someone learn to play a new game
- Helping someone to fix a bike
- Assisting a friend with a home project
- Helping someone who is unwell or struggling physically to complete household tasks



Having someone who consistently lifts you up can make you feel unstoppable! Their support can help you tackle challenges, take risks and grow comfortable with being confident about yourself.

Beyond that, it creates a sense of belonging, community, and mutual support, leading to greater productivity and success. Don't we all feel more capable when someone is willing to help us when we are feeling low? It helps us be a little less self-conscious about needing help, and more motivated, because we know that there's someone supporting us.

Balance your energy

Now, it's also important to keep in mind that as amazing as it is to support others, it can also be very tiring. Burnout is a real risk for those who spend a lot of time providing support. It could be that the support isn't reciprocated, or that you're trying to support too many people. Your own life may be complex, and you may not have the energy to help others.

If you are in an unequal relationship (you're the only one giving) or healthy boundaries are not clear (your energy is not endless!), you'll eventually reach a point where both your mind and body will force you to take a break. It's important to make sure you set boundaries and know when to look after yourself.

Leading through lifting

Lifting others up is integral to leading, especially when using strength-based leadership. After all, strength-based leadership is all about focusing on a person's strengths and helping them grow. It's a powerful way of engaging with others and can create huge change for individuals and communities alike.

When we embrace and practice understanding, communication, integrity and empowerment, we create a supportive environment in which everyone can thrive. We create a culture that appreciates the importance of lifting others up, and a world that celebrates it.



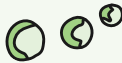
Reflection time:



Do you hold leadership roles in your home, community, or among peers? How do you approach your leadership role that uplifts both yourself and others?

How do you lead and empower others to grow and thrive?

What is confidence, how do you develop it and why is it important in leadership development?



Sally's story

I was temporarily appointed Acting CEO of an organisation. It was my first time in such a role and to say I was feeling nervous was an understatement. One of the first meetings I attended, I was nervous that I knew none of the other people in the room. As I entered, I was warmly welcomed by those present.

During that meeting, everyone was incredibly kind and supportive – but particularly two ladies. I was encouraged to share my perspective and contribute to the discussion.

This support continued throughout the rest of my time in the role. These women ensured I had access to all the contacts and background information I needed so I could be effective in my role from day one.

After around a year in my role, another organisation appointed a new CEO. Still touched by the way I had been welcomed when I started, I reached out to this lady. I met with her on several occasions and attempted to provide the same kind of support I had received.

Reflecting after leaving my role, it was lovely to be a part of a network of women who were dedicated to supporting each other; who were willing to share and work together to ensure we were all in the best position possible as we set about representing our organisations and its members.



Key concepts

- 'Lead by lifting others up' is about the leadership style that aims to empower and support others to achieve their fullest potential.
- This type of leadership is inclusive. It recognises the strengths and potential of everyone. It aims to use and develop those strengths to achieve the best outcomes.
- When we lead by lifting others up, we create a culture of understanding, cooperation and shared success.



Workbook activities

Activity 1: Identifying strengths

It's not always easy to know our own strengths. Sometimes, others notice strengths in us that we don't see. How often do we take the time to let someone know when we notice something amazing about them? Encouraging others to see their strengths can boost their confidence and help them know what others value about them.



Materials

For this activity each person will need:

1. Paper
2. A small container such as a jar, bowl or box (this will be used to store your strengths in)

Option

If you are feeling creative, you could have craft items available to decorate the containers. What they will hold is valuable so it's nice to make them look special.

Instructions

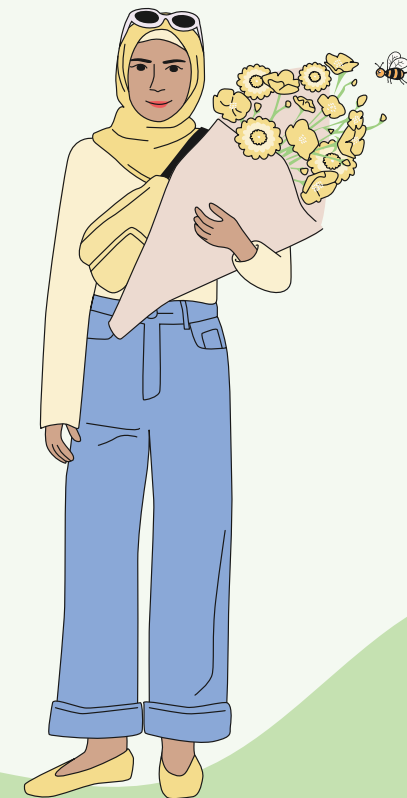
- Ask everyone to think of a time in their life when they have demonstrated strength.
- Each person takes turns to share their story without being talked over.
- After listening to each person's story, group members take time to reflect and write down on pieces of paper, the strengths they noticed about that person from their story. Write one strength on each piece of paper.
- Fold each piece of paper and place in their container for them to read later.
- Then, move on to the next person and repeat the process.



By the end, everyone's container will be filled with strengths named by the group. Keep your container as a reminder of your strengths.

If you are completing this activity on your own, think of someone you know or admire who has shown strength. What do you admire about them? Write down the strengths you think they showed.

Now think about yourself – what do you have in common with them? What strengths do you share? Are there strengths that are uniquely yours?



Activity 2: Creating affirmations

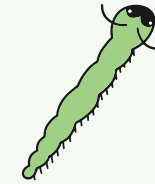
Let's continue from the previous activity.

Materials

For this activity you will require:

1. Paper
2. Pens and coloured pencils or markers

Writing affirmations is a great way to promote a positive mindset which is important for our overall wellbeing. Now we have supported each other in recognising our strengths, let's work together to create affirmations that are meaningful for women and gender diverse people with disabilities.



Affirmations should challenge negative thoughts and be positive and empowering. For example:

'I am capable of achieving success because ...'

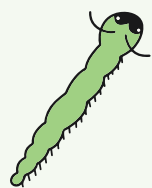
'I deserve love, respect and acceptance just as I am.'

'I am strong and resilient in the face of difficulties.'

'The world is lucky to have me because ...'

'I am fabulous just the way I am because ...'

'Looking after me is important. It is my first priority.'



These are the starting points for the affirmations, but it is even more meaningful if you make them specific to you, such as:

"I can achieve success because I have succeeded in so many areas of my life so far, such as learning to drive, supporting my friends and family, completing a qualification, sticking to my self-care plan..."

"The world is lucky to have me because I am a friend who people feel safe to turn to in difficult times, and to celebrate achievements with, laugh with and rest with."

When you make affirmations specific to you, using real life examples, you will know that they are true.

If you are doing this activity in a group, have a discussion with your group about unhelpful thoughts you could challenge and helpful thoughts you could reinforce. Create affirmations for each thought. Create as many affirmations as you like. Write your affirmations on paper or get creative and design posters for each affirmation.

By the end of the activity, everyone should have multiple affirmations written on their paper or affirmation posters to keep. Look at them daily to remind yourself of just how great you are!

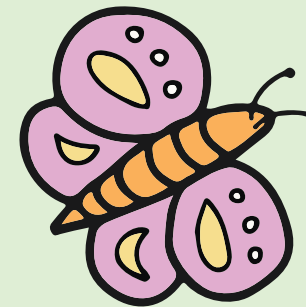
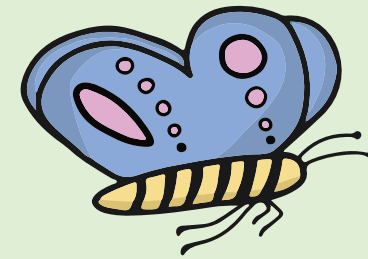
You will find some other great examples of affirmations at the links below.

<https://www.neve-plainenglish.wwda.org.au/level-4-page/affirmations>



Review

'Lead by lifting others up' refers to a leadership style that aims to empower and support others to achieve their fullest potential. It is this type of leadership that creates opportunities for others to feel included, valued and heard. This approach is inclusive, considers the strengths and potential of everyone, and aims to use and develop those strengths to achieve effective and meaningful outcomes. When we 'lead by lifting others up', we create a culture of understanding, cooperation and shared success.

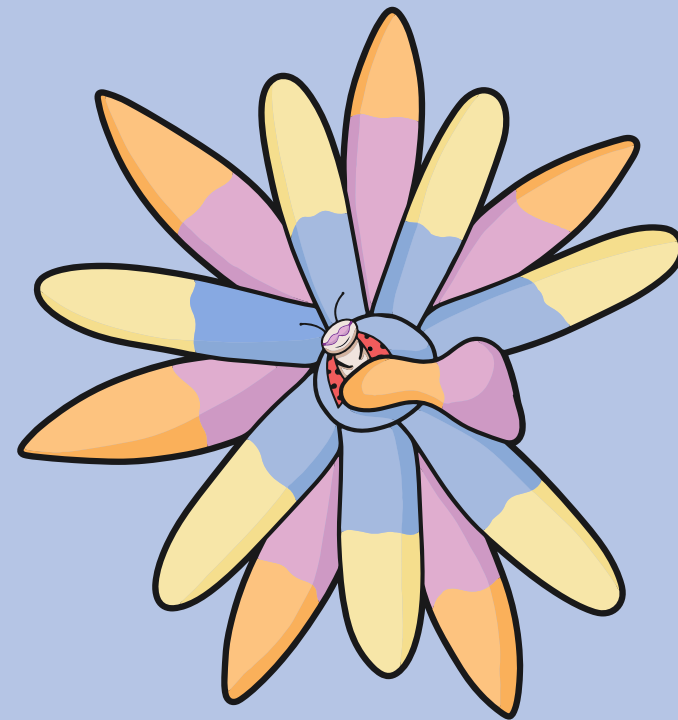


Leadership Principle

“Trust your power and stay strong in your decisions.”

WWDA member

Care for self to care for community



Our last principle is 'care for self to care for community.' What first comes to mind when you think of this principle? Does it sound like an important one?

While it can sometimes be treated with a tokenistic nod (or maybe an eyeroll), it's widely known that self-care, or caring for yourself, is important. And just as in every other area of your life, caring for yourself is an important part of leadership. So, let's break this principle down.

[Principle video](#)



Care for yourself

What does it mean to 'care for yourself'? When self-care comes up, it's often followed with a list of 'treat yourself' activities like bubble baths and massages. And yes, taking time out to pamper yourself is one way of caring for yourself, but self-care goes beyond that.

When was the last time you asked yourself, "What makes me laugh?", "What brings me peace?" or "What makes me happy?"

To really be able to care for yourself, you need to get to know who you are as an individual, and what your needs are.



Self-care looks different from person to person. Maybe you're a bit of an introvert and need time alone to reboot. You might like going on nature walks, going to the beach or reading a book. Of course, introverts need social connection too. Knowing how much social time you want and need is important for self-care.

Or maybe you're the opposite. Many extroverts get their energy from others. Time spent meeting new people, or with people they care about, might be what brings a smile to their face.

Maybe you need something completely different! What are a few things you like to do? What is it about them that makes you feel good? How often do you take time to do them? What else could fill those needs?

Check in with yourself

It's also important to remember that learning about ourselves and our needs, is a continuous process. As we grow and change, so do our needs. Understanding how to nurture your physical, emotional and mental wellbeing changes, as you do. What brings you peace and happiness now, might be a little (or a lot) different to what you needed ten years ago. That's why it's always good to keep checking in with yourself.

Caring for yourself is important for many reasons, but it's not always easy to make the time. You might have many tasks that need doing, not enough time, or you might feel selfish for wanting to focus on you.

That's why it's always good to have a list of reminders about why it is so important to look after yourself. Next time you're feeling overwhelmed, come back to this list.

- You deserve to look after you! Would you tell someone you cared about that they don't deserve to be cared for? No! Don't say it to yourself, either!
- It is okay to take time away from caring for others or from work to look after yourself.
- Taking care of yourself increases your capacity. With self-care you'll have much more of yourself to give, if you choose to!



- Your mental health needs to be renewed just as much as your physical health. That means you need to care for yourself in both areas.
- Understanding how to care for yourself helps you learn about who you are. The more you learn about yourself, the more you might like being in your own skin. It'll make it that much easier to become your own best advocate!
- When you learn about your own needs, you will also learn how to see others' needs (another skill added to your repertoire!). It's important for a leader to know how to learn about the needs of the people they're supporting, so why not start with yourself?



Caring for community

Okay, we've got a good handle on the benefits of caring for ourselves – but how does caring for ourselves help to care for our community?

When we learn how to care for ourselves, we're also learning the skills needed to care for others. The great thing about this knowledge is that we can apply it to our family, friends and any groups we interact with – like our community! When you engage with that deeper understanding of each person's needs you can be helpful in creating healthier and happier communities. Understanding what other people need is an important part of being a good leader.

It all starts with understanding each other!

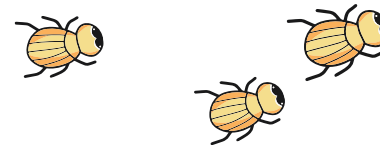
There are the essential needs of course like food, water, and sleep. But there are also human needs - connection, self-reflection, emotional wellbeing and safety. These are the things that help people and the community to thrive. By understanding and fulfilling your own needs, you learn how to assess and address the needs of those around you. When you apply your understanding, you showcase the amazing ripple effect of this principle.

So, caring for self is good for you, the people around you and the community that you are part of. But what about leadership?

Leadership and caring for self

'Care for self to care for community' is a fundamental part of leadership. When you lead by example (one of the core parts of leading), and show that self-care is a priority, you encourage others to do the same. This means all the benefits you reap from self-care are shared by the people around you.

In the long-term, this can foster a culture of wellbeing, community and respect where everyone knows the importance of taking care of themselves - because it's in everyone's best interests!



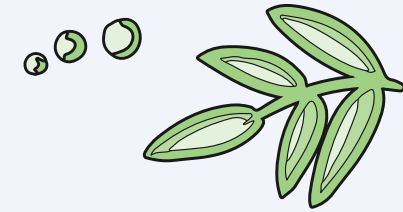
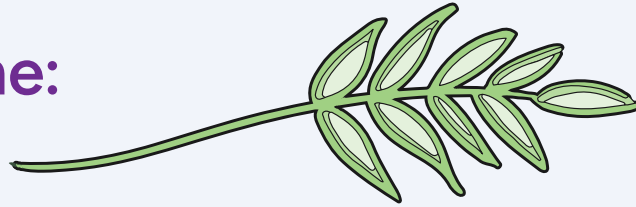
In some cases, you might even be helping someone give themselves permission to prioritise self-care.

As a leader, you're better equipped to support and guide others when your needs have been met. It's easier to problem-solve, show patience, be creative and have understanding for others when you're rested, energised and happy. Imagine what wonders would be created, if everyone was feeling like that!

Contrary to our negative self-talk, self-care isn't selfish, or even a check-box process – it's essential. By prioritising your own wellbeing, you're a more capable and compassionate leader, who helps others to grow into equally capable and compassionate leaders. And when we work together to incorporate all parts of this principle, we create amazing communities we can be proud of.



Reflection time:



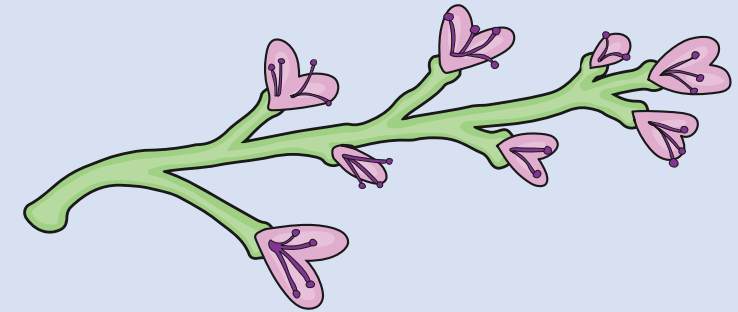
In what ways do you set boundaries for your self-care?

What activities do you prioritise for self-care and are you engaging in these activities regularly?

How do these boundaries support you to maintain a healthy balance in life?

In what ways could you prioritise your own needs more and ask for assistance when necessary?

Charlie's story



There have been many times throughout my career, especially when I have been in leadership roles, where I have felt the weight of a problem. In these moments I have often felt unsure about how to proceed because there was no one 'right' way forward. During these times I'd find myself prioritising work over my personal needs, be it food, relationships, or exercise. I'd spend longer and longer at my desk, telling myself that if I just worked harder the perfect solution would materialise. Needless to say, this didn't work. Often, it simply resulted in me becoming rundown and unwell and feeling frustrated and resentful.

I knew that self-care was important but being neurodivergent I often found many of the self-care ideas unappealing. Over time, I began to re-think what self-care meant for me. I didn't have to schedule time for massages and bubble baths, or to sit idly in the sun. None of that was relaxing or rejuvenating to me.

I learnt that for me, when I have an issue I can't solve and am unsure about how to move forward, the best thing I can do is go for a run or do some other form of exercise. Often, this is when I'd process everything, and the next step would then make itself known.

I learnt that while I may not have felt hungry, I had to nourish myself and eat something that felt good to me. Finally,

and most importantly, I learnt that not knowing how to solve an issue didn't make me a 'bad' leader. I learnt that there was nothing wrong with reaching out to colleagues, mentors, or friends and asking for their input – or even just for an ear to vent to. Not only did this help me stay connected with people important to me, but also provided me with the perspective I needed to move forward.

While my self-care looked very different to the self-care around me, it served me in a constructive way and even though I was never 'perfect' at it, it went a long way to ensuring that I was able to take care of my community.

Key concepts

- Self-care is important, especially as a leader. You can't help others if you're running on empty.
- Self-care is about identifying more than your basic needs. Spend time reflecting on personal activities that bring you happiness and fulfillment.
- As you grow, what makes you feel happy and fulfilled can change too. Keep checking in with yourself and adjusting your self-care routine.
- When leaders take care of themselves, they're better at understanding and supporting others.
- Leading by example and making sure everyone's wellbeing is a priority, encourages a healthier and more productive community.



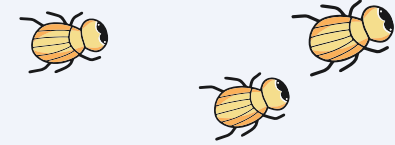
Workbook activities

Activity 1: Setting healthy boundaries

This activity is designed to help you make decisions about how you use your energy and how to set boundaries that will support your health and wellbeing.

Introduction

How often have you attended an event, said yes to something, or done something when you were too tired? We often talk about setting boundaries, but how many of us actually set healthy boundaries in our lives?



Consider what boundary setting would look like to you. Think about whether you apply those principles in your life. Reflect on the following questions to help you consider what boundaries you may need to set:

- Are the majority of home duties left to you?
- Are you working and raising a family?
- Are you studying and balancing many things?
- Do you believe you don't need, or have time, to rest and recover?
- Do you always feel you need to say yes when asked to do a task or attend events in case others judge or think less of you?
- Do you mostly put everyone else's needs before your own?
- Do you often feel like you have no energy left from doing too much?

Setting a healthy boundary means:

- That we know what it is we want; and
- We are clear with others about what we expect from them.

You can set healthy boundaries by putting your needs first and asking other people to respect those needs. Be prepared to respect the boundaries of others too, as they are also practicing self-care!



Use the table on the following page to identify some of your needs that require a healthy boundary to be set. The first row has provided an example for you to see how to complete the task.

Start with the needs you feel uncomfortable setting boundaries for. These are likely to be the ones you need to practice the most.

For more information on how to set healthy boundaries and caring for self in different situations you can explore the links below.



<https://www.neve-plainenglish.wwda.org.au/level-4-page/saying-no-and-setting-boundaries>



<https://www.neve-plainenglish.wwda.org.au/calm-space>



<https://www.relationshipsvictoria.org.au/news/setting-healthy-boundaries-230328/>¹¹

What is your need?	What is the boundary you would like to set?	How will you ask for it?
I can't attend events with too many people because it affects my mental health.	I would be happy to come to the event early on and leave before others arrive.	I will be clear with my needs stating that I can only attend if I can leave early.

Activity 2: My self-care – part 1

Self-care is important for making sure we can be the best version of ourselves. There are various forms of self-care such as:

- Physical: exercising, sleeping, eating nutritious foods
- Social: calling or catching up with friends or family
- Mental: meditation, counselling, journaling, artwork
- Community: volunteering in your community, looking after your community
- Financial: saving for something you need or love, setting a budget, paying the bills
- Purpose: learning more about something of interest, taking a holiday or doing activities you value





Fill out the table below with your self-care needs:

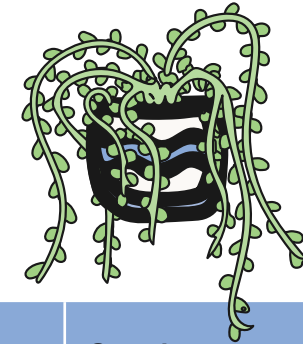
Physical	Social	Mental
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
Community	Financial	Purpose
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.

Activity 3: My self-care – part 2

Complete your personal self-care schedule. Aim to include as many self-care needs as you feel comfortable completing. Self-care is often neglected. That is why scheduling it into our daily routine helps us to prioritise self-care and consistently follow through.

If completing a schedule is not for you, change the plan to suit you. Consider using phone reminders or your email calendar instead.





Example self-care schedule:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning	Physical: Complete my stretches	Mental: Meditate	Physical: Go for a walk	Physical: Complete my stretches	Mental: Meditate	Physical: Go for a bike ride	Social: Breakfast with family
Afternoon	Mental: Meditate	Community: Help with reading activities at kid's school	Purpose: Take a lunch break outside the office.	Purpose: Research different plants suitable for community garden project.	Purpose and Social: Meet friend for lunch.	Financial: Complete weekly budget	Mental: Journal my week
Evening	Social: Call a friend	Purpose: Start exploring next holiday destination	Purpose: Enjoy a cup of tea	Financial: Create budget for holiday	Community: Volunteer at community garden	Social: Visit friend	Purpose: Moisturise my hands and paint my nails

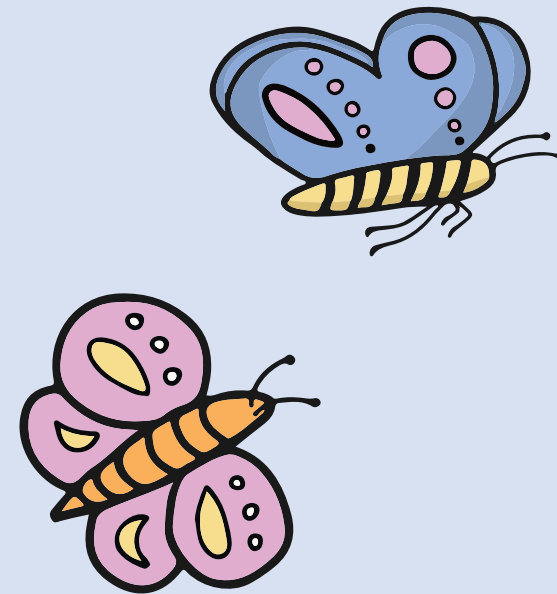


My self-care schedule:

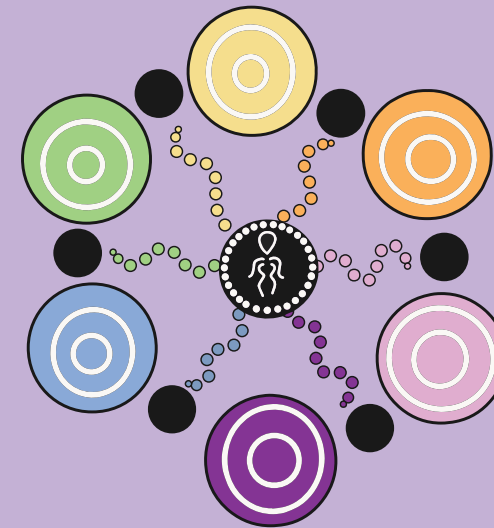
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

Review

Self-care is important, especially in leadership. You can't support others effectively if you're not taking care of yourself. Identifying your self-care needs requires recognising more than your basic needs and finding activities that bring you happiness and fulfillment. As you grow, what brings you happiness can change, so it is important to regularly check in with yourself and adjust your self-care routine. When leaders take care of themselves, they're better at understanding and supporting others. It's like leading by example and making sure everyone's wellbeing is a priority. This encourages a healthier community.



Safe leadership



We've explored a lot of ways that you can be, and are already being, a leader. In many of these situations, you take an active role, whether you're leading by example, guiding others, or offering support as others work towards their goals.

However, not all settings are safe physically, psychologically, or emotionally. It can sometimes be harmful to you or others to stay in unsafe settings and relationships.

While it's hard to do, sometimes leadership means prioritising your own and others' safety.

Let's look at when walking away is the best option. For example, maybe you find yourself in a situation where there is an abuse of power or authority. This may be at work, on a committee or advisory group, or in a school. Wanting to speak out against mistreatment is natural, but sometimes it's not safe to do so. Sometimes, your leadership needs to be leading the way out. This means prioritising safety and finding the best way to address the issue at another time, if that feels right. This doesn't mean that the issue goes unresolved, it only means that you're looking for the safest and most effective way to do it. You might also decide not to resolve an issue when that is the best solution.

Safety online

Today, the online space can also be a place where 'walking away' can be best. Given it's such a big part of our lives, it's important to consider how you interact online. For many, navigating the internet can be social and fun. Some people use the internet as a way to relax. It can also be a powerful platform to speak about your passions. One great positive of the internet is that a single voice can reach many people and bring about positive change such as a campaign to protect a forest or to open conversation about discrimination.

But while there are amazing aspects to being online, it's important to remember there are downsides too. At times, people show their worst side when they can hide behind a screen online.

This can lead to cyber bullying. This kind of bullying can be very harmful and feel overwhelming, isolating and inescapable.

Is this something you have experienced? Even if you haven't, you've probably seen examples of how poorly someone can be treated, or can treat others, online.

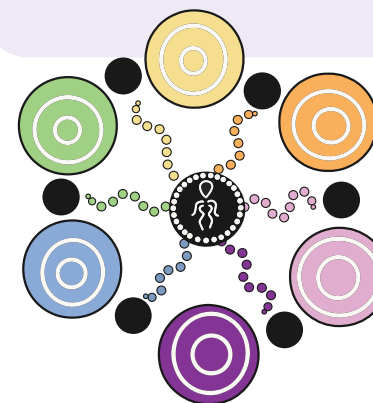
Of course, we're not suggesting that you don't use this amazing connection and communication tool. Instead, we hope to encourage a little of our last principle – '[care for self to care for community](#)'. Give yourself time to consider whether the online space you're engaging with – and the way you are engaging – is safe for you. Consider the outcomes, good and bad, that could come from it and know where to reach out for help if you need it.



Visit this website for more information: <https://www.esafety.gov.au/communities/living-with-disability>⁴



You can also find more information on being safe online here: <https://www.neve-plainenglish.wwda.org.au/level-4-page/how-to-be-safe-online>



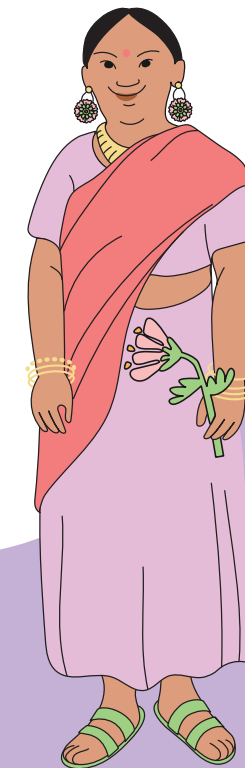
Take a pause

Are unsafe situations the only ones you should walk away from? Not necessarily.

While it's important to assess safety as a leader, there are other instances where walking away is a good temporary option. When emotions are high, it can be better for everyone to step away and take a few breaths. No one will handle a situation or take on new information well if they are feeling angry and stressed.

In these cases, it can often be better, and result in better outcomes, to lead by walking away. If someone continues to behave in a way that feels disrespectful and is not open to learning more respectful ways to communicate, this may be a time to walk away permanently or seek support from others if that is not an option.

Can you think of a time where you walked away (or on reflection wish you had) because it was the best way for you to lead?



Mentoring

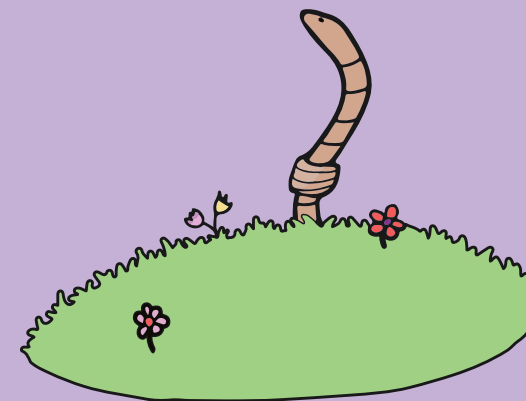
What is a Mentor?

A mentor supports and encourages others by sharing their wisdom and resources and creating a safe learning environment. They support mentees to find the knowledge they need to work towards their goals and dreams, while fostering curiosity, inquiry, and reflection. Mentoring aims to build the mentee's skills and knowledge over the long-term.

What is a Mentee?

A mentee is the person who is supported and guided through the mentoring process. They choose the goals and areas they wish to develop their skills and knowledge in, with support from their mentor. The mentee is always in control of the direction of the process and shares their insights with the mentor.

Mentoring is where someone with more experience (a mentor) helps guide the learning and growth of someone with less experience (a mentee).⁵



Why mentoring?

Whilst some successful women and gender diverse people with disabilities are less visible in our society, it will be important for them to have direct contact with other women with disabilities who are:

- working in jobs they care about;
- actively participating in family life; and
- taking their rightful place in the community.

These women are needed as role models, mentors and muses. It is only through their presence and wisdom that we can learn how being disabled and women can be an asset, a source

of resilience and creativity that must not be denied nor overcome, but rather celebrated.¹²

**If I see it,
I can be it.**

How often do women and gender diverse people with disabilities have access to positive role models who can support them in exploring their strengths, talents, and passions? How often do women and gender diverse people with disabilities have access to mentoring that is meaningful to them?

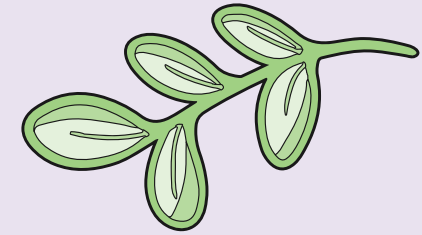


Women and gender diverse people with disabilities are often mentors themselves with unique mentoring strengths. They can offer a range of exciting and motivational possibilities. They can also provide an opportunity to explore disability as an important part of identity.

Through access to many and varied role models, women and gender diverse people with disabilities can discover a life that best suits them and their individual strengths and provides opportunities for growth.



Reflection time:



How has a disability helped shape your hopes, dreams, and goals in life?

Who are the women and gender diverse people with disabilities in your life that motivate and encourage you to reach for your goals?

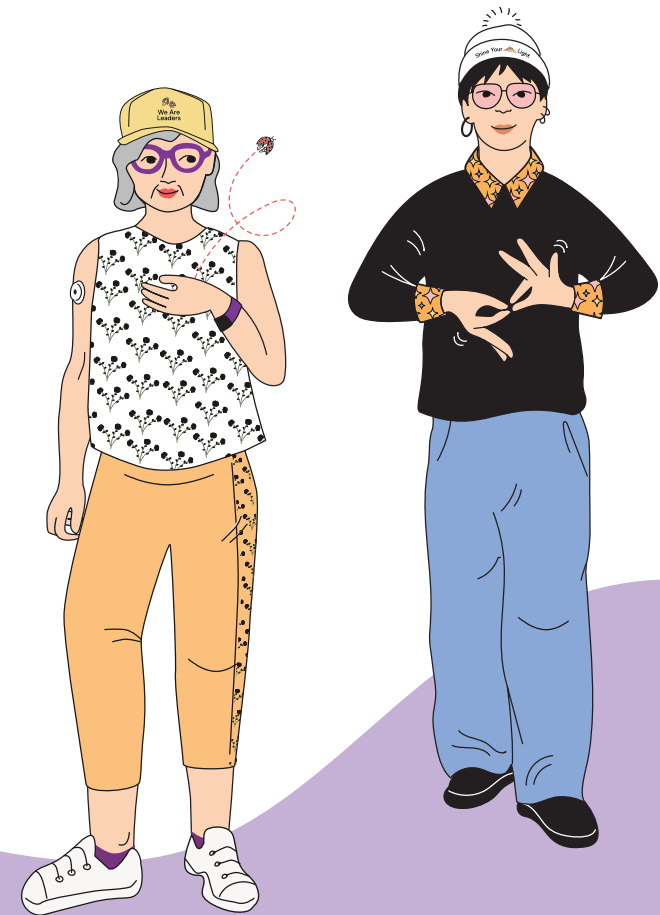


The role of mentors

The knowledge, advice and resources a mentor shares depend on the specific mentoring relationship and goals of the mentee. A mentor may share with a mentee information about their own career path, or other life goals, as well as provide guidance, motivation, emotional support and role modelling.

Mentors support their mentees to identify and explore a range of potential solutions, rather than focusing on one right way.

The delicate balance of mentoring someone is not creating them in your own image but giving them the opportunity to create themselves.



What does a good mentoring relationship look like?

- Both parties are clear on the expectations and boundaries of the relationship. They have a mentoring 'contract' and stick to it.
- Both feel safe and trust all interactions will be respectful and appropriate.
- The mentee is in charge and empowered to set the agenda and goals for what they want to work on; the mentor is there to facilitate the mentee's development.
- The mentee has the opportunity to develop outside of their comfort zone in helpful ways.
- The mentor listens more than they speak, ensuring the mentee feels heard and understood. The mentor asks questions that make the mentee think.
- The mentor is encouraging and can see and speak about the mentee's worth even when the mentee cannot see it themselves. This might mean sharing with a mentee the concept of 'Imposter Syndrome' and how common it is for many people. Imposter Syndrome is further explored in the activities section.
- The mentor is willing to share what they know, can assist with opportunities, and provide respectful feedback.
- Trust is built as both parties are honest, prepared, approachable and reliable.



Discussing each other's access needs and strengths at the start of the relationship and throughout the mentoring relationship is helpful to both the mentor and mentee.

Mentors can be a role model using a [strengths-based approach to leadership](#).

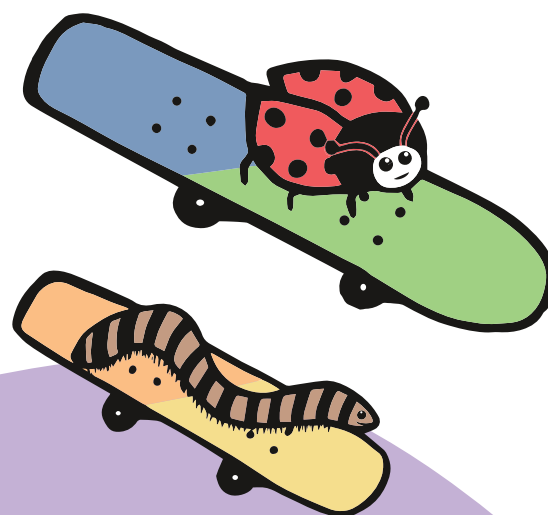
Take time to highlight the strengths and unique value that disability brings to the relationship.

Consider how individual requirements will be communicated and managed ahead of time. Forward planning may be required in task management. Additional time may be helpful for some tasks. Meetings may need to be cancelled at the last minute to allow for appointments, rest or healing. It's important to make sure that people's accessibility needs are met, so that everyone can be included.

Discussion Point: How will you both handle punctuality and non-attendance issues?

You may want to share information about your disability upfront. Everyone has things in life that need to be considered and there may be times where you may need to cancel meetings with little notice. Ongoing reliable and respectful communication leads to understanding and trust.

Modelling open, honest and respectful communication that celebrates diversity, will ensure the relationship is focused on the mentee's progress.



Creating a successful mentoring relationship

1. Set expectations together at the very beginning

Agreed expectations will set the foundation for measuring success. To make sure that the mentoring sessions are helpful for the mentee, you should consider what actions you should increase, decrease or continue doing.

Agreed expectations will help the mentor and mentee to assess the process.



These questions can be helpful for self-assessment:

- Are we both keeping to our agreements? If not, how can we change this?
- Do I [the mentor] see behaviour change and action from my mentee?
- Am I [the mentor] leading the process according to the mentees' pace and agenda, or mine?
- Are we respecting and considering each other's individual needs?

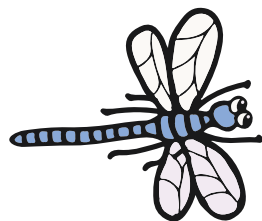
2. Take a genuine interest in your mentee as a person

Ensure you are listening and make a conscious effort to really pay attention to what your mentee is saying, instead of thinking about what you are going to say next. You might worry that you need to come up with something helpful right away, when in fact, the best thing you can do is to listen closely to what they are saying, ask open questions, dig deeper and act as a sounding board. Hitting the pause button will create moments to reflect on the type of feedback required to support the mentee.

3. Improve your understanding of the other person

Any time you become a mentor for someone, you will find yourself getting to know their unique personality, their wants and needs, the experiences that have shaped them and how they deal with different situations.

The best mentors know how to unlock this information by asking the right questions, reading their mentee's body language, being open-minded and noticing their own emotions.



4. Do not assume anything about your mentee, ask them questions

It is easy to fall into stereotypes or not see a situation from another person's perspective. Great mentors recognise that it is their responsibility to break through common assumptions by asking questions and digging deeper. Share discussions about your disabilities and how you may have been stereotyped or underestimated in the past. Have you done the same to others?

5. Be forthcoming about mistakes you have made

Being open to sharing your own mistakes and difficult times is one of the best gifts a mentor can give. Not only is it helpful information for problem-solving, but it also helps build trust, gives them permission to share their own mistakes, and strengthens the relationship overall. Frame mistakes as the most valuable learning opportunities. If a mentee is sharing how they feel they failed in a situation, ask them if they can 'flip it' to how they can use this as a learning experience. Find the value.



6. Celebrate the mentee's achievements

People often look for or call upon a mentor to help them with tough situations. Sometimes this can mean that many mentorship conversations may revolve around the negative. When you take the time to highlight and even celebrate your mentee's successes and achievements, you are not just balancing out the mood of those conversations, you are also building your mentee's confidence. You are reinforcing the good and keeping them focused and motivated.



7. Seek out classes or projects related to skills your mentee wants to develop

Look for, and create situations where, mentees can get involved to learn new skills they have been hoping to learn. Take note of the areas in which your mentee wants to grow and always be looking for opportunities to point them in the right direction.

8. Lead by example

Be a positive role model; your mentee can learn a whole lot from you by simply observing how you behave.

Mentees pick-up information about your ethics, values and standards; style, beliefs and attitudes; and methods and procedures.



Being a great mentor takes practice and patience. The more you work with a given mentee, the more you will learn about them; their communication style, how they process feedback and how they go about pursuing their goals.

You will also learn a lot about yourself; how effectively you can explain ideas, how well you are able to manage your emotions, and whether you are able to provide a direction that motivates others.³

Read the real story below from one of our WWDA members. Use this as a discussion topic with other women and gender diverse people with disabilities and share individual experiences.

Alex's story

Alex had always loved nature and animals, and her dream was to work as a biologist. She started a science degree straight out of school and quickly found that she struggled to cope on field trips and with the fine motor requirements of the laboratory units. There were few supports available for students with disabilities at that time, and after a year, Alex felt she had no option but to switch to another course and leave her dreams behind.

After years in a rewarding and successful career in community services, Alex came across a citizen science research group focused on marine research. The project itself was land based and Alex saw that several of the team had disabilities. Alex was able to follow these role models and realised it was possible to fulfill one of her dreams to make a positive impact in conservation and animal-related research. She reflected that it is important to never give up on your dreams, even if it takes a little longer to get there than you expect.



Discussion questions

1. Would Alex have put herself forward for this opportunity if she had not seen other women and gender diverse people with disabilities in the team?
2. How might seeing other women and gender diverse people with disabilities as role models in our community help you consider more possibilities in life?



What is the difference between mentoring, counselling, coaching and training?

These four supports can seem similar but are different in the following ways:

Mentoring supports a person's individual wellbeing and direction and can be focused on both whole of life journey as well as progressing in a career. Mentors share their story and experiences as motivation.

Counselling is a therapeutic process where a trained professional helps their client explore a personal or emotional issue in a safe and confidential environment. The client is the focus, and the counsellor listens and contributes little about themselves.

Coaching supports a person to improve skills within their job or life based on observations from the coach. It is focused on set tasks or specific life goals, relatively short-term, and feedback is usually from the coach.

Training is focused on learning specific skills from a trainer.⁸

What if the mentoring relationship does not go according to plan?

Mentors and mentees are responsible for their own wellbeing, safety and satisfaction in a mentoring relationship; no one else can do this for them.

By establishing 'ground rules' and boundaries, the wellbeing, privacy, dignity and safety of both parties are maintained.

In a healthy mentoring relationship, mentors and mentees will sometimes be questioned in ways that may make them feel uncomfortable. Mentees could experience emotions like anger, sadness, blame, guilt or shame. The mentor's job is not to take these feelings away but to offer understanding and perspective to work through them.

What is not okay is either the mentor or mentee doing or saying anything that feels inappropriate, manipulative, inauthentic, unsafe or is in pursuit of an agenda that hasn't been agreed to. Discuss any concerns with your mentor or mentee immediately and reach out for support if a resolution cannot be reached.

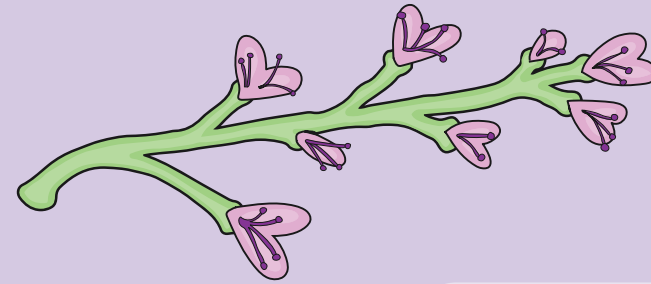


What are the benefits of being a mentor?

- Improves your communication and personal skills
- Develops your leadership and management qualities
- Reinforces your own skills and knowledge of your subject(s)
- Increases your confidence and motivation
- Engaging in a volunteering opportunity is valued by employers⁹
- Provides opportunity to reflect on your own practice
- Enhances job satisfaction
- Develops professional relationships
- Uses your experience, making it available to a new person
- You will often receive more than you give



Sarah's story



Sarah is a young woman with a passion for technology who dreams of pursuing a career in software development. Sarah was born with a vision impairment. Despite her talent and enthusiasm, she often feels discouraged by the lack of representation and support for people with disabilities in the tech industry.

One day, Sarah attends a networking event for women in STEM fields, hoping to find inspiration and guidance for her career journey. At the event, she connects with Emily, a successful software engineer who is also vision impaired. Emily shares her own experiences of navigating the tech industry as a woman with a disability and offers invaluable advice and encouragement to Sarah.

Through their mentoring relationship, Emily not only becomes a role model, but a source of encouragement and support for Sarah. She helps Sarah explore adaptive technologies and strategies to overcome barriers in her education and career. With Emily's guidance, Sarah gains the confidence to pursue internships and networking opportunities, eventually landing her a job at a leading tech company.

Sarah's story highlights the transformative impact of mentoring for women and gender diverse people with disabilities. By connecting with a mentor who shared similar experiences and understood the barriers she was facing, Sarah was able to pursue her passions and thrive in a field that once seemed out of reach.

Discussion questions:

- What makes a good relationship between a mentor and a mentee?
- What do mentors and mentees need to be good at?
- Can you think of a time when having someone to learn from has helped you grow?
- What was it about that person that helped you?
- How can mentors make sure everyone feels included and respected?
- How can they help everyone learn and get better together?

Key learnings



There are many aspects of mentoring that will be the same no matter who your mentee is. For example, recognising that we all have strengths and areas of improvement - and that's okay!

To help reach the best outcomes when mentoring women and gender diverse people with disabilities, it is important to see and understand the experiences of women and gender diverse people with disabilities.

It can be common for women and gender diverse people with disabilities to experience discrimination and

negative attitudes from other people in the community. Mentoring can help people to recognise their strengths and abilities, and provide support for difficult situations.

Mentoring and leadership opportunities can help people learn about their rights. Remember, we all have the same rights no matter what we look like, or how our bodies work.

Some women and gender diverse people with disabilities will need adjustments so mentoring work for them. For example, women and gender diverse people with disabilities may



need extra time between sessions to work on tasks. They may also need to change meetings and may need materials or information presented in plain language or Easy Read. Talking to the person about what they need is important.

Where to from here?

Mentors can play a vital role in the lives of women and gender diverse people with disabilities, offering valuable support and connections while exploring strengths and aspirations. Witnessing other women and gender diverse people with disabilities succeed in leadership roles, we gain confidence and motivation to pursue our dreams.

Here are some links to current mentorship programs for women and gender diverse people with disabilities:



Enabling Women Mentoring Program - Women with Disabilities Victoria
www.wdv.org.au/¹⁴.



Advancing Women project - People with Disability Australia pwd.org.au¹⁰.



Find a PACE Mentor - <https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/students-jobseekers/find-a-mentor/> - Mentor programs available in Australian capital cities or online¹.



Young Leaders Programs - <https://cyda.org.au/youth-hub/young-leaders/> - Available online for ages 18-25 years².



Y Connect - <https://www.ywca.org.au/support/y-connect/> - Mentor program available in Toowoomba, Queensland¹⁵.

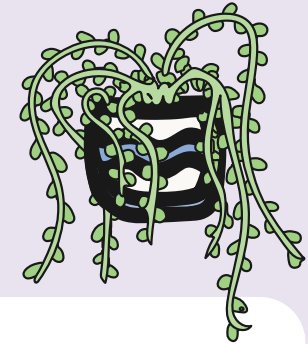
Do you have experience, or are you interested, in being a mentor or mentee? Check out the information on [Groups](#), which is later in the toolkit to learn how to create an advocacy group.



Workbook activities

Activity 1: Imposter syndrome and self-esteem journal

Imposter syndrome is when someone thinks they are incapable, despite achieving success. It's common, especially among women and gender diverse people with disabilities, who might face stereotypes about their abilities and gender. Feeling out of place or doubting yourself occasionally is normal, but constant doubt might indicate imposter syndrome. This mindset can lead to negative emotions like depression and low self-esteem, social isolation, and missing out on opportunities. Writing a journal in which you challenge these thoughts can help you identify negative thought patterns and turn them around.

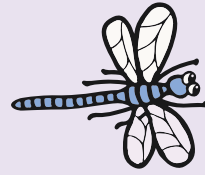


Traits of imposter syndrome

- Setting unrealistic, high standards for ourselves
- Thinking you are not qualified or good enough for your role or task
- Feeling like an outsider
- Focusing on negative feedback and ignoring positive feedback

Consequences

- Missing out on opportunities
- Low self-esteem and confidence
- Anxiety and depression
- Social isolation
- Burnout
- Low productivity



Learning opportunities all around us

It is common for people that experience imposter syndrome to be perfectionists. This is when someone sets themselves high standards in everything they do. When these high standards are not achieved, they will often feel disappointed with themselves. It is important to recognise that no one is perfect and that we are continually learning. That is why changing our mindset to consider the positive in situations can help. We can choose to look at every situation as an opportunity to learn and grow.

Think of a time when you experienced imposter syndrome and answer the following questions.

1. What was the situation?

2. What were your thoughts and feelings during this situation?

3. How could you have thought about the situation differently? For example, "I know I can't do that" could become, "I have done things I thought I couldn't do before. Perhaps I can make a start and see how I go."

4. What have I learnt from this situation?

5. How does what I've learnt inform my leadership?

6. Were your thoughts true?

For example, if you thought everyone at a new workplace was going to see you were not capable, was that true? What are some alternate thoughts, such as: "I was nervous when I first started in my last job, but everyone was understanding that I was new, and I got the hang of it more quickly than I expected!"

7. How can I support others when they experience imposter syndrome?

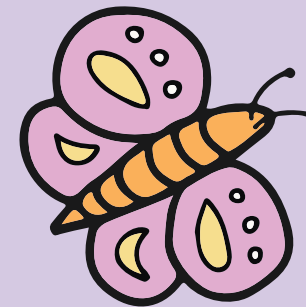
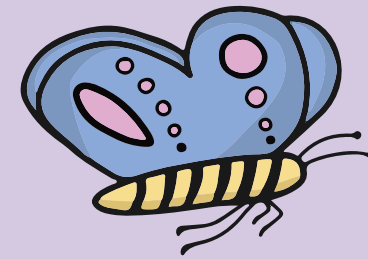
Now share this activity with your mentor, a trusted friend or a family member. Ask them to share any positive lessons to learn from this experience that you may not have considered.

Review

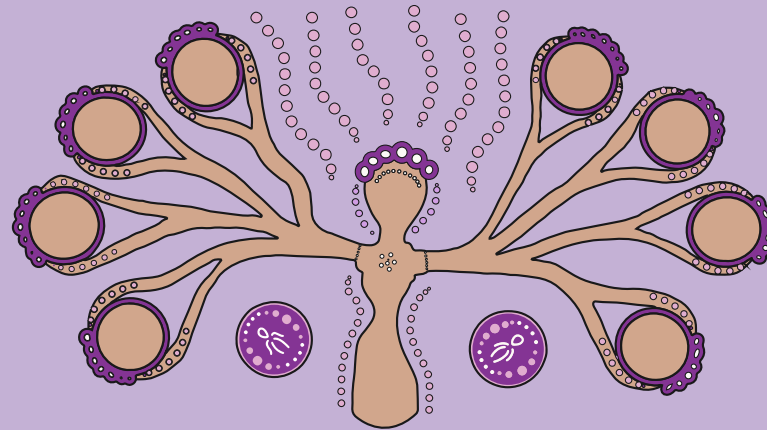
A mentor supports and guides another person by sharing their knowledge and resources, helping them to reach their goals. They focus on developing the mentee's skills for the future, fostering a safe space to learn, and letting the mentee lead the process.

Women and gender diverse people with disabilities are also mentors, offering mentees possibilities suited to their strengths, and providing opportunities to explore disability as an important part of their identity.

Access to many varied role models is important because they show how having a disability and being a women or gender diverse person can be an asset, and a source of strength and creativity that should be recognised and celebrated.



Groups



At WWDA, we believe in the power of community and collective action. That's why we're dedicated to providing resources and support for women with disabilities to connect, work, and advocate together. One way to do this is through groups such as peer groups and advocacy groups. These groups provide a safe space to come together, get to know each other, share experiences, and support each other.

Getting to know other people who have a similar disability to you can be a good way share understanding and support, and to make friends. You can do this by contacting organisations or community groups that support people with your specific disability. Many national and state-based disability organisations run regular support group meetings and social activities. Some may also be active on social media and have online discussion forums where you can chat to other people with the same disability. Many also offer support for families. These groups can be a good way of meeting people and sharing advice and experiences.

An example is the WWDA Facebook page and group. Check them out:



<https://www.facebook.com/WWDA.Australia/>



<https://www.facebook.com/groups/WWDACommunity/>

Check out what some of our members had to say about what they gained from the Peer Support Group:

"I liked meeting people who were like me and had disabilities and being heard."

"Feeling like part of the community and valued by peers and leaders. Learning from experts and others with experience. It is always a pleasure to contribute and leaves me feeling less isolated"

"Meeting other people, learning about new resources."



For tips and strategies on how to form a group visit: <https://www.limbs4life.org.au/uploads/resources/A-Practical-Guide-for-Setting-up-a-Peer-Support-Group.pdf>⁶



Self-Advocacy groups can be found here: Voices Together - The Australian Self Advocacy Website¹³ <https://www.voicestogether.com.au/>



Workbook activities

Activity 1: Group artwork

Working on a piece of art as a group is a great way for everyone to contribute their unique ideas while encouraging teamwork. It is also a way everyone can experience success by using their own strengths.

Be creative and design a piece of art that is meaningful to your group. It could be designing a poster, a logo, a video story, or making a patchwork quilt. The options are endless.



Talk to every person in the group throughout the creative process about their contribution in a positive way that is specific to them. Refer to the affirmation activity in [‘lead by lifting others up’](#) for more ideas on how to develop specific affirmations.



For example:

“The colours you have chosen are great because they bring out the nature theme of the artwork.”

“The texture of the material you chose feels soft which will mean people would like to touch the quilt. I am sure everyone will be much more connected to it as a result. The group is lucky to have someone with your understanding of materials.”

Affirmations that are specific can really make someone’s day or even month!

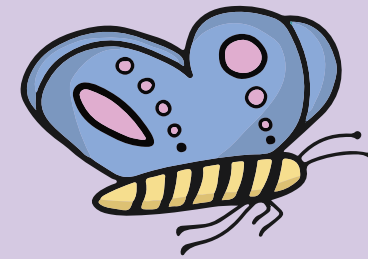
WWDA member:

I was in a women’s group and every month we participated in art and craft activities. I have never felt this was my area of strength. At first, I was reluctant to get involved. I could see everyone else making such beautiful creations. One of the women in the group encouraged me to have a go and then started sharing with me what she loved about what I was doing. Even though I still thought my efforts were not great, it gave me such a boost that she had noticed me and noticed good things about my creativity.

Review

WWDA believes in the power of community and collective action. One way to do this is through groups such as peer groups and advocacy groups. These groups provide a safe space to come together, get to know each other, share experiences, support each other and work towards positive change. It is these groups that provide group members with a sense of belonging and understanding that is often not found elsewhere.

Sometimes the most suitable group cannot be found, and you might want to start a group. Starting a peer support or advocacy group involves various steps to ensure success, like finding the need and purpose, recruiting members, and creating the structure. Leading a group offers an opportunity to put your leadership skills into practice.



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