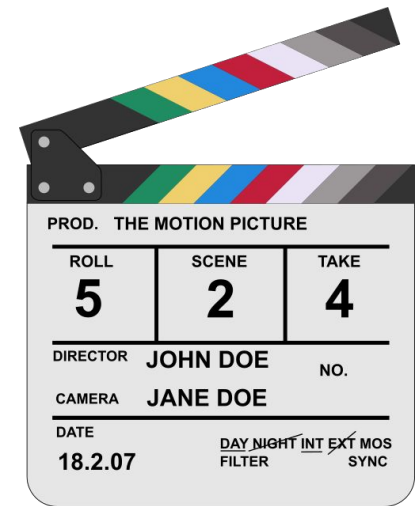


Disabled People in Movies, TV & Video Games Why Representation Matters



Green Mountain Self-Advocates

Stories Shape How People See Us



- Movies, TV and Video Games tell stories
- These stories teach people about disability
- Sometimes stories are good. Sometimes they are wrong or hurtful.

👉 *What movies, shows, or games do you like?*

Inclusion

Many people spend a lot of time watching TV — sometimes even more time than they spend hanging out with friends. That might sound surprising, but it's not always a bad thing. TV shows and movies can help people understand each other better. Over time, seeing different kinds of people on screen has helped build acceptance for groups that were once left out. In that way, screen time can actually help make the real world more welcoming.



Here's the Problem



It only works when those groups are truly included in the stories. People with disabilities make up 20% of the population. That is about one out of every five people. Yet, on TV, fewer than 5% or one out of every 100 characters has a disability. And when disabled characters *do* appear, most of the time they are not played by disabled actors. Only a small number are.

Representation Matters

Think about how strange that would be in other situations. Imagine if almost all women characters were played by men. Or imagine watching a show about teenagers, but almost every teen is played by someone in their 40s. It wouldn't feel real. People would notice. It wouldn't feel real — and people wouldn't accept it.

That's why representation matters. If disabled people aren't truly shown on screen, the stories don't reflect real life — and we all lose out.



Why Do We Need to Be Represented in Movies, TV and Video Games

- Seeing disabled actors helps us feel proud
- It teaches others to respect us
- Bad stories lead to low expectations
- Good stories show real lives



The Peanut Butter Falcon – Zak

Zak has Down syndrome. He runs away to follow his BIG dream of being a wrestler.

He is brave, funny, and makes a best friend.

The key messages are:

- **Everyone deserves a chance.**
- **Friendship matters.**
- **Take healthy risks.**
- **Dreams are for everyone.**

Support should build independence



Friend from "Toy Story 4" – Forky

Forky is different. He feels anxious and doesn't know where he belongs. But his friends help him, and he learns he is important just the way he is.

The message is: It's okay to feel different or scared.



Avatar: The Way of Water - Jake Sully



This movie sends mixed messages about disability through the character Jake Sully. Some people in the disability community appreciate seeing a main character who uses a wheelchair. But many also feel uncomfortable with how his story is told.

Jake is shown as a hero, but the movie focuses on him being “fixed” and leaving his disabled body behind. This can make it seem like disability is something you have to escape, instead of something you can live with. It also fits a common movie pattern where disabled characters have to be extra strong or “super” to be valued.

Disabled People on TV

JJ DiMeo — *Speechless*

- Played by **Micah Fowler**
- Micah has cerebral palsy in real life.

Walter White Jr. (sometimes called Flynn) — *Breaking Bad*

- Played by **RJ Mitte**
- RJ also has cerebral palsy.

Julia — *Sesame Street*

- Voiced by **Stacey Gordon**
- Stacey is autistic in real life.



Disabled Characters in Video Games

Hailey Cooper - *Marvel's Spider-Man: Miles Morales* (2020)

When announced, many players were excited to meet a new Spider-Man hero, **Miles Morales**, in a video game. The game delivered an action-packed story focused on Miles — and it also made history by introducing **Hailey Cooper**, the first Deaf Black character in a major (“AAA”) video game.



Common Problems in Media

Media often shows disabled people as

- ✗ helpless, needing to be rescued
- ✗ treated like children, even as adults
- ✗ “inspiring” instead of real people with full lives
- ✗ heroes just for getting through the day



What Good Representation Looks Like

People with disabilities are seen:

- Making choices
- Having jobs
- as Friends and partners
- Being Married, Raising Kids
- Speaking for ourselves
- Living in the community



It's best when a disabled character is played by an actor who really has that disability. That's real! A character should be a hero, a friend, funny, or smart—not *just* 'the person in the wheelchair.' Their disability should only be one part of their story

Our Voices Matter

Stories with disabled characters are important. They help everyone understand each other. They let US see ourselves as friends, heroes, and stars!"

If YOU were in a movie or game, what would you want the story to be about?



Closing



- Media shapes how people see disability
- Representation matters
- Disabled people deserve respect
- Speaking up creates change