

Myths and Facts about People with Disabilities

Everybody's fighting some kind of stereotype, and people with disabilities are no exception. The difference is that barriers people with disabilities face begin with people's attitudes — attitudes often rooted in misinformation and misunderstandings about what it's like to live with a disability.

Myth 1: People with disabilities are brave and courageous.

Fact: Adjusting to a disability requires adapting to a lifestyle, not bravery and courage.

Myth 2: All persons who use wheelchairs are chronically ill or sickly.

Fact: The association between wheelchair use and illness may have evolved through hospitals using wheelchairs to transport sick people. A person may use a wheelchair for a variety of reasons, none of which may have anything to do with lingering illness.

Myth 3: Wheelchair use is confining; people who use wheelchairs are "wheelchair-bound."

Fact: A wheelchair, like a bicycle or an automobile, is a personal assistive device that enables someone to get around.

Myth 4: All persons with hearing disabilities can read lips.

Fact: Lip-reading skills vary among people who use them and are never entirely reliable.

Myth 5: People who are blind acquire a "sixth sense."

Fact: Although most people who are blind develop their remaining senses more fully, they do not have a "sixth sense."

Myth 6: People with disabilities are more comfortable with "their own kind."

Fact: In the past, grouping people with disabilities in separate schools and institutions reinforced this misconception. Today, many people with disabilities take advantage of new opportunities to join mainstream society.

Myth 7: Non-disabled people are obligated to "take care of" people with disabilities.

Fact: Anyone may offer assistance, but most people with disabilities prefer to be responsible for themselves.

Myth 8: Curious children should never ask people about their disabilities.

Fact: Many children have a natural, uninhibited curiosity and may ask questions that some adults consider embarrassing. But scolding curious children may make them think having a disability is "wrong" or "bad." Most people with disabilities won't mind answering a child's question.

Myth 9: The lives of people with disabilities are totally different than the lives of people without disabilities.

Fact: People with disabilities go to school, get married, work, have families, do laundry, grocery shop, laugh, cry, pay taxes, get angry, have prejudices, vote, plan and dream like everyone else.

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Myth 10: It is all right for people without disabilities to park in accessible parking spaces, if only for a few minutes.

Fact: Because accessible parking spaces are designed and situated to meet the needs of people who have disabilities, these spaces should only be used by people who need them.

Myth 11: Most people with disabilities cannot have sexual relationships.

Fact: Anyone can have a sexual relationship by adapting the sexual activity. People with disabilities can have children naturally or through adoption. People with disabilities, like other people, are sexual beings.

Myth 12: People with disabilities always need help.

Fact: Many people with disabilities are independent and capable of giving help. If you would like to help someone with a disability, ask if he or she needs it before you act.

Myth 13: There is nothing one person can do to help eliminate the barriers confronting people with disabilities.

Fact: Everyone can contribute to change. You can help remove barriers by:

- Understanding the need for accessible parking and leaving it for those who need it
- Encouraging participation of people with disabilities in community activities by using accessible meeting and event sites
- Understanding children's curiosity about disabilities and people who have them
- Advocating a barrier-free environment
- Speaking up when negative words or phrases are used about disability
- Writing producers and editors a note of support when they portray someone with a disability as a "regular person" in the media
- Accepting people with disabilities as individuals capable of the same needs and feelings as yourself, and hiring qualified disabled persons whenever possible

(**Easter Seals Society:**<http://www.easterseals.com>)