

SAME AND DIFFERENT: RESPECT FOR ALL

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, www.disabilityisnatural.com

Use this outline of a head and draw yourself.



Who are you? A son or daughter, brother or sister, soccer player or artist, doll collector or game player. You may also be tall or short, have light or dark skin, or be the owner of big ears, freckles, or a small nose! Think about all the different things that make you the one-of-a-kind person you are. But are you *only* your hair color or body size or freckles or nose? And would you like someone to call you "Freckles" or "Skinny" or any other name like that? What would that make you feel like?

Now think about your friends or classmates. Are they just like you? Some might like the same TV shows as you, but their hair or eyes are different. So you're alike in some ways, but you're also different!

There are many ways we're all the same and all different, aren't there? Do you know other people who may have differences that are called "disabilities"? What is a disability, anyway? It's just a body part that works differently.

Maybe one of your grandparents wears a hearing aid or uses a mobility device, like a cane, walker, or wheelchair. Sometimes, we think we should feel sorry for people like this. But would you want anyone to feel sorry for you, because of your difference—like your big ears or small nose or hair color or body size? And isn't it wonderful that hearing aids, mobility devices, and other things are available? They allow people to do what they want to do. Think of all the things in *your* life that allow you to do what's important to you!

What is a disability?
A body part that works differently!

Some people—like your grandparents or others—acquire a disability through an accident, illness, or becoming older. Others—like my son, Benjamin—are born with a disability, just like you were born with blue eyes or brown hair. And people with disabilities are more *like* you than different!

Benjamin uses a power wheelchair to get around and a laptop computer to do his schoolwork. When he was younger, he loved

We're
all
alike
and
different!

Wheelchairs,
hearing aids,
talking machines,
and other devices
are helpful tools!

Thomas the Tank Engine, took karate lessons, and more. Today Benjamin is in college, like you might be one day.

Are there students with disabilities in your school? Some disabilities are visible—you can see someone’s wheelchair or a difference in their face or body, or in the way they communicate or behave. Other disabilities are invisible—you can’t see them—but the person might learn or understand things differently.

We may be curious about a person’s difference—and that’s okay. But the way we *show* our curiosity and the *words* we use may feel hurtful to a person with a disability. So here are some ideas to make sure we’re always respectful:

—Don’t stare—that hurts. Instead, say “Hi,” and introduce yourself. A person with a disability wants to have friends just like you do.

—Don’t ask, “What happened to you,” or “What’s wrong with you?” What would it feel like if someone asked you, “What’s wrong with your ears?” Once you get to know the person, you’ll learn more about his difference just because you’re friends! You’ll also learn that—like your big ears, small nose, etc.—his difference isn’t the most important thing about him.

—If the person looks like she needs help, ask first! Don’t push her wheelchair or help in other ways without asking first, and then provide help in the way the person wants.

—Some people might have speech that’s difficult to understand at first. But once you’ve become friends, you’ll learn to understand their words. Other people may use a talking machine; be patient as they respond with the machine. And some people may use a sign language interpreter. If so, when you talk to the person, look at *her*, not the interpreter.

—Use “People First Language.” Put the person before the disability. Just like you’re not “Big Ears,” a person with a disability is not “Autistic” or “Crippled” or anything else. Say, “He has autism,” or “He uses a wheelchair.” And never use disability words as insults, like calling someone “retard,” “lame,” “spaz,” “idiot,” “moron,” “imbecile,” or other insults.

—Focus on what the person *can* do, instead of what she can’t. Just like you, people with disabilities have many strengths and abilities!

We’re all the same and we’re all different. Treat others how you want to be treated and you’ll be doing your part to make the world a better place for all!



People
First
Language
puts
the
person
first!

NOTE TO PARENTS AND TEACHERS

The “Same and Different: Respect for All” article was written for younger children. Obviously, there’s a great difference between a kindergartner and a sixth-grader, and I tried to find a happy medium. The article might be a “above” kindergarten curriculum and “below” middle-school curriculum. Thus, an adult might need to read the article to younger children and add appropriate explanations, but I hope that a copy can be made for all children so they can take it home and have further discussion with their parents. For higher grades, you can supplement this article with the “People First Language” article and others on my website (www.disabilityisnatural.com).

The intent of the article is to help children (1) accept differences in others—specifically the difference we call “disability,” (2) learn the importance of using People First Language, and (3) recognize that disability is a natural part of life (some people are born with disabilities, others acquire them via accident, illness, or the aging process).

I hope you will encourage children to make the “Same and Different” article “their own,” by:

- Using the “face outline” in the article to draw themselves (I left room for a “body” too).
- Coloring in the words in the sidebars of the article—I used an outline font for most of that text.

Here are some other ideas:

- Pair up students and, on a separate sheet of paper, they can draw themselves and their partner, noting their similarities and differences. Using the theme expressed in the article (“A disability is a body part that works differently.”), the children can note how their body parts are different from their partner. For example, some kids can run faster than others, while others are more limber and can touch their toes easier than others; some kids are better at drawing, others at singing; some are great at talking, others are more quiet and thoughtful; some are great at math, others at language. Help the students recognize that we all have different abilities in our bodies and minds.
- Facilitate a discussion about people with disabilities known to your students: grandparents, other relatives, neighbors, and, of course, students with disabilities in your school. Explore “pity” and how dangerous it is. When we feel pity, we make the person “less than” in our minds and a patronizing (not equal) relationship exists. Encourage children to talk about the strengths/abilities of the people with disabilities they know.
- Widen the discussion to include other differences. There are many categories to explore, such as religions, cultures, family structures, sports teams (how are basketball players different from baseball players), and the list goes on.

- Explore the use of tools as helpful devices for all people. As noted in the “Same and Different” article, hearing aids, mobility aids, and other devices are great tools that enable people with disabilities to do what’s important to them. Contrary to seeing someone who uses a wheelchair, for example, and “feeling sorry” for them, we can feel happy that the wheelchair was invented (and continues to improve)! My son’s power chair gives him the freedom and mobility to take karate lessons, act in plays, go to college, and more! Discuss the ordinary—but critically important—tools used by your students: pencils and paper, computers, desks, globes, maps, and so much more. What if they didn’t have pencils and papers? Would they need to go outside and write in the dirt with a stick? (My “Ordinary Needs” article explores this topic in greater detail.)
- Discuss *respect* for differences, caring for one another, and the harm of name-calling and other hurtful actions. Talk about the use of “disability descriptors” as insults. One of the most popular insults a child can hurl at another is “Retard.” What does it say about our society that we’ve taken medical diagnoses and turned them into insults? It represents the marginalization and devaluation of people with disabilities.
- If you’re a teacher, I hope your class/school includes students with disabilities in the general ed environment. If a student with a disability is in your general ed classroom, he/she should be an active member of any discussions, and should not be talked “about” as if he’s not even present! If your school is *not* inclusive—if students with disabilities are primarily segregated in special ed/resource rooms—your job is harder, for when you discuss respect and equality with your class, how is the segregation of students with disabilities justified? In addition, even with a productive discussion in your classroom, the risk is great that your students might continue to see students with disabilities (who are segregated and/or invisible at your school) as “different.” I hope your school will abandon the old ways (segregation) and embrace inclusion (which is, essentially, mandated by Federal special ed law). My book (*Disability is Natural*) and a variety of articles may be helpful in this regard.
- On the issue of “disability awareness,” I do not recommend the traditional methods, such as “disability simulations,” the use of puppets (“Kids on the Block”), etc. For more information on this, read “Disability Awareness vs. Similarity Awareness” at www.disabilityisnatural.com.

I hope these ideas are helpful, and I thank you for encouraging children to adopt new ways of thinking! I would love to hear from you so I can share your ideas with others. Thanks for all you do to create a more inclusive society for all! Kathie Snow, braveheartpress@msn.com, 210-320-0678