

Revolutionary Common Sense

and

New Ways of Thinking

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Expert Wisdom

The True Experts—people with disabilities—have taught me that others' **Words, Attitudes, and Actions** have a greater impact on their lives than the actual disability. Therefore, positive changes in our words, attitudes, and actions can generate positive changes in the lives of the people we care about!

Disability is a Natural Part of Life

“Disability is a natural part of the human experience that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to enjoy the opportunity to live independently, enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, and experience full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of American society.”

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act

People with disabilities are more like people without disabilities than different—let's focus on similarities, instead of differences!



Isn't it time
for change?

Redefining Disability

- A disability is just a medical diagnosis that becomes a passport to services.
- A disability simply means a body part works differently; do you have a normal body—does *anyone*?
- Disability is a consequence of the environment. When people have the assistive technology, supports, and accommodations they need, the disability becomes irrelevant. We don't need to try to change people with disabilities, we need to change the environment.

A disability diagnosis is one of *many* characteristics of being human, and should never be used as the *defining* characteristic of a person!

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If thought corrupts language, language can also corrupt thought. *George Orwell*

Our Words Matter

- Using People First Language (putting the person before the disability) is critically important; people with disabilities are people, first—they're *not* their diagnoses. (See my PFL articles at www.disabilityisnatural.com.)
- Reframe “problems” into “needs,” as in, “He needs behavior supports,” instead of, “He has behavior problems.”
- There's nothing “wrong” with a person who has a disability; let's eliminate this soul-crushing descriptor.
- “Special needs” should also go in the garbage heap—it generates pity and segregation.
- Let's throw out other descriptors that marginalize or devalue; let's engage our brains before we open our mouths!

Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will break our hearts. *Robert Fulghum*



Everyone is Born Included

Inclusion is the natural state of being—it's the default position! Every person is *born* included and will remain included unless someone (parent, team, professional, etc.) decides the person should be "placed" in a separate, segregated environment. Let's ensure people with disabilities enjoy the birthright of inclusion that people *without* disabilities take for granted! And let's never, ever "ask permission" for a person to be included.



Eliminate the Disability Double Standard

People *without* disabilities:

- Do not focus on what they cannot do;
- Are not defined by their medical diagnoses;
- Do not share their medical conditions with everyone;
- Are known by their abilities, strengths, and interests;
- Are presumed competent and do not have to prove they're "ready" to be included in ordinary activities;
- Do not allow others to control their lives and their destinies.

Think of other examples, and adopt this principle:

**If It's Not Okay for a Person Without a Disability,
It's Not Okay for a Person With a Disability!**

Believe it can happen and it will. *The belief comes first; the how follows.* If you don't *believe* it can happen, it won't. The barrier is never a person's diagnosis, but our attitudes and actions!

Keys to Success

Presume competence in people with disabilities!



Think chronological age, not developmental age; let's make sure people with disabilities have opportunities to *be* the age they really are.

Ensure people with disabilities have the **assistive technology, supports, and/or accommodations** they need to be successful at home, school, work, etc.

Have **high expectations** for people with disabilities; expect them to **be responsible** and make their own decisions. People live up or down to our expectations; remember the "self-fulfilling prophecy."

Let's **protect the privacy and dignity** of people with disabilities: **no more apologizing and/or explaining** about a person's differences—it's nobody's business. The general public will stop staring and be more welcoming when people with disabilities move from the invisibility of "special" environments and take their rightful places as valuable, participating members of their communities!

www.disabilityisnatural.com has more strategies to create positive change.

People with disabilities don't want to be stuck in the special, segregated places of

Disability World.

Let's do what it takes so they can live

Real Lives in the Real World

like people who *do not* have disabilities.

Real Quality of Life

is about Relationships and Experiences, not functional skills!

The #1 Need

of most people with disabilities is not more services or benefits, or acquiring more "life-skills" or walking or talking or behaving appropriately, etc.—the #1 need is *having friends!*