

“Wrong” Is Not Right!

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

“Wrong”—the word is routinely used about people with disabilities. Listen as physicians and parents talk about when they first realized “something was wrong” with a child. Educators or service providers are told about a new student or “client,” and then ask, “What’s wrong with him?” And a young girl sees a person with a visible disability in the mall, tugs at her mother’s hand, and says, “What’s wrong with him?”

“Wrong” is a word that rolls off our tongues when our brains aren’t engaged. Using the word in the ways described may have originated in the medical field. A pain in your body, for example, sends you to the doctor so he can fix what’s “wrong.” And when applied to people with developmental disabilities, this word can lead parents, educators, and medical/human services personnel to take action: doing everything possible to make a person “right,” through therapies, interventions, and more. But the word and the actions it provokes can *shred the souls* of the people so described, and lead to segregation, devaluation, and more.

The use of “wrong” as a descriptor for people with developmental disabilities is just not right! Many adults have said they’ve *never* felt “good enough”—believing there *is* something wrong with them. Why wouldn’t they feel this way since this word has wounded, again and again, every time it’s spoken—creating a deep and painful injury that never heals? Some children and adults who feel they’re “wrong” give up, believing there’s no need to try, no future to strive for, and no reason to care about themselves or the world around them. Others rebel against this attack on their souls and resist the efforts of those who attempt to “fix” them. The “fixers” may respond by attaching even more descriptors: noncompliant, behavior disorder, aggressive, and others. Isn’t it time to change our attitudes and banish this devastating descriptor?

The Federal Developmental Disabilities Act states, “Disability is a natural part of the human experience.” It’s as natural to have a disability as it is to not have one! Some of us are born with conditions *which are categorized as disabilities*, while many of us will *acquire* one through accident, illness, or the aging process. Unfortunately, however, some in the medical and pharmaceutical industries, encouraged by the Jane and John Does who seek human perfection, are pushing other natural conditions—menopause, wrinkles, balding heads, feeling nervous, and more—into the realm of “something wrong” that should be fixed or treated via medical care!

Moreover, presuming that a *difference* represents “something wrong” or an “inferior” status reflects *dominant majority* arrogance, bias, and prejudice. The dominant “white” majority once believed “blacks” were inferior. Similar situations exist in religion, politics, and other arenas.

There is *nothing* wrong with people who have conditions we call developmental disabilities, but there *is* something wrong with *us*, when we cannot accept the humanity of others. *A disability simply represents a body part that works differently!* Years ago, when strangers asked what was wrong with my young son, I learned to respond,

“There’s nothing wrong with him; his legs *work differently* than yours, and his walker helps him walk.” Who among us is “perfect” or “normal”? Perhaps we’ll be able to accept differences in *others* if we first recognize the differences in *ourselves*.

Isn’t it time to eliminate “wrong” when describing people whose bodies or minds might be different from the dominant majority? Isn’t it time to stop judging others and sentencing them to a lifelong, soul-crushing belief that their unique humanity makes them *wrong*?

DO YOU KNOW
WHAT IT’S LIKE
TO FEEL *WRONG*
24-HOURS A DAY?
DO YOU KNOW
WHAT IT’S LIKE TO BE
DISAPPROVED OF,
NOT ONLY FOR WHAT
YOU DO AND SAY
AND THINK,
BUT FOR
WHO YOU *ARE*?
Joyce Rebeta-Burditt