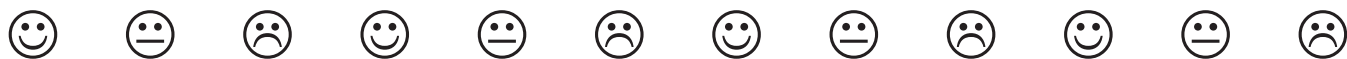


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# HALLOWEEN AND THE MASK OF DISABILITY

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Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, [www.disabilityisnatural.com](http://www.disabilityisnatural.com)



The end of October brings us to the one day in the year when kids of all ages (and adults who want to be kids again) can be someone else—simply by donning a mask, wearing a costume, or painting one's face. It's a fun time for all!

It's also a time to reflect. To one degree or another, we all wear masks—many different masks—day in and day out. In the mornings, we put on the masks that turn us into employees, teachers, students, or a variety of other roles. Later in the day, we take those off and put on other masks: parents, wives, husbands, lovers, baseball players, scrapbookers, and more. In between are the masks we wear as advocates, volunteers, and a wide variety of other roles. It's a fluid, sometimes unconscious, process.

But what about people with disabilities? For too many, a disability diagnosis creates a permanent (and negative) mask in the eyes of society. The disability is used to define the person: his abilities, potential, character, value, and more. Decisions about where and how a child is educated—in an inclusive or a segregated setting—are often based solely on the child's diagnosis. Whether an adult enjoys a real job in the community or is stuck in a segregated “get-ready” environment is often dependent on the diagnosis. These are just two examples of the many ways in which we allow the MASK OF DISABILITY to hide the real person and imprison him in the role of a second-class citizen.

People who *don't* have disability diagnoses wear many different masks throughout their lives—and from morning to night! We're free to change them at will: to discard those we no longer need and add new ones at any time. A woman might be a mother and a wife and a driver and a sales rep and a knitter and a shopper and a cook and a volunteer and a football fan and...the list is endless.

Shouldn't people with disabilities have the same opportunities? Shouldn't a child with a disability be able to be a student and a soccer player and a Scout and so much more? Shouldn't an adult with a disability be able to be a worker and a friend and a volunteer and a baseball fan and so much more?

What will it take for each of us (and society-at-large) to change our thinking and our actions so the MASK OF DISABILITY no longer defines the humanity of men, women, and children who happen to have conditions we've categorized as disabilities? And let's always remember, *they never asked* for the permanent MASK OF DISABILITY!

Using People First Language; recognizing disability as a natural part of life, just as gender, ethnicity, and other traits are natural; acknowledging the strengths and abilities of individuals with disabilities; and ensuring they live real and natural lives included in all aspects of our society are some of the strategies that can eliminate the MASK OF DISABILITY once and for all!