

FACT or OPINION?

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

Do we use facts or opinions when forming attitudes and actions about people with disabilities? Do we distinguish between the two? How many decisions—perhaps life-altering decisions—are made about children/adults with disabilities based on *opinions* (usually negative opinions), not facts?

When a physician diagnoses a child with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism, etc., we could say the statement is a fact. (However, the majority of developmental disability diagnoses are based on *observation* of the child, not scientific/medical tests, so there's plenty of room for a physician's opinion during the observation. But let's move on...) Much of what the physician says *after* announcing the diagnosis, such as the negative prognosis—what the child will not do and more—reflects the physician's *opinions*. Yet many parents believe these are *facts*, and then take actions based on the so-called facts.

In turn, parents usually share this information with therapists, teachers, service providers, and/or others who may accept negative opinions as facts, *and* who may also add their own opinions (presented as facts), such as: “Children with autism need _____,” or “People with Down syndrome, can't _____,” etc. We've now entered the realm of Gossip, Rumor, and Innuendo, as well as Stereotyping and Prejudice—yes, we are prejudging others when we operate from opinions or assumptions.

With unchecked power and momentum, this runaway train continues, and critically important decisions may be made: about the potential of a child or adult with a disability; where/how the child will be educated; where/how the adult will live, work (or not), etc.; what services will be needed (or not); whether the person will drive, go to college, live on his own, get married, and much, much more.

Let's stop this runaway train! The next time you think about a person with a disability, check your thinking: is it a fact or an opinion disguised as fact?

At the next planning meeting—IEP, IHP, etc.—for a child or adult with a disability, let's ensure decisions are based on facts, not opinions. Someone might say something like, “He can't learn in a general ed classroom...” How could anyone *know* this unless the child has been in a general ed class (with appropriate modifications, supports, etc.)? Ditto if we

say a person will never drive, can't live on his own, can't have a real job, can never be alone, etc. *How would we know if the person hasn't had the opportunity to try?* We assume too much.

There's nothing wrong with having opinions. The danger comes when we use opinions—not facts—to make important decisions about another person's life. Questioning whether it's a fact or a negative opinion *and* embracing positive perspectives (“It's a possibility...let's give it a try...”) can open the door to new opportunities for success for children and adults with disabilities. What would *your* life be like—your ability to get a home loan, advance in your job, and more—if others made decisions based primarily on negative opinions, not facts? And how could you defend yourself against this injustice?

Historically, other groups have been marginalized and devalued based on opinions: women shouldn't vote; people of color shouldn't own property; people of the LGBT community shouldn't do this or that; and more. As the fiction of negative opinions is replaced with facts, attitudes and actions change. Isn't it time to free people with disabilities from the tyranny of negative opinions disguised as facts?

Page 2 of this document is a table tent sign. Fold (or cut) in half, and use in your home, school, office, or at team meetings. You can even color in the outlined words!

To be conscious that you are ignorant of the facts is a great step to knowledge.

Benjamin Disraeli

OPINION



OR



FACT



FACT



OR



OPINION

