

7 Things You Do to DISable People... and How to Stop It!



Most of us have been brought up to believe that people are disabled by their bodies and minds. But upon closer review, it is apparent that societal attitudes and actions—or lack of action—are often more disabling than any differences of the body or mind. So here are *7 Things You Do to DISable People*.

- 1. Exclude people from educational opportunities.** Inclusion early on in life is essential for fostering life quality. No matter a person's perceived capabilities, they should have the opportunity to learn alongside their peers and be challenged. Focus on the long-term benefits of inclusion and find ways to include everyone. Model an inclusive mindset for children. Embrace everyone, no matter how different, in academic settings and beyond.
- 2. Exclude people from vocational opportunities.** Unemployment rates for people with disabilities are exceedingly higher than those of people without disabilities, even though people with disabilities have a proven record for being the most dependable employees. Flexible job development and accommodations can make a difference for individuals with disabilities and their employers. Create flexible jobs and accommodations, when needed, and hire people with disabilities.
- 3. Exclude people from social arenas of life.** Everybody needs to feel a sense of belonging within their community. Instead of expecting “special” programs and therapies to meet people's social needs, embrace all people in arenas such as clubs, churches, community hang out spots, events, etc. If someone makes too much noise, or flaps their hands, or looks too different, get over it. Don't judge them or their families. Provide any accommodations they might need to feel welcome and valued.
- 4. Prevent access to environments.** For people who have mobility disabilities, barriers to access are a major stressor. Just a few examples are steps, heavy doors, narrow pathways, people placing shopping carts or signs in the middle of sidewalks, or stores placing racks too close together. These and other barriers

prevent people from getting to their desired destinations. Think about your daily routes. If you used a wheelchair, how would your environment disable you? Don't create barriers for people.

5. **Maintain low expectations of people's capabilities.** So often, we judge someone based on a diagnosis or their ability to communicate with words. Just as physical limitations are not an indicator of one's ability, diagnostic labels and speech abilities tell us nothing about what a person can understand and do. Always presume competence. Even if someone cannot respond to you through conventional means, assume that they do understand. Interact with them in a way that emits respect and dignity and empowerment.
6. **Disregard people's thoughts, desires, or communications.** We do a disservice to people when we believe that we know what is best for them, and fail to honor their expressed thoughts and choices. Sometimes, people communicate with their eyes, their bodies, assistive communication devices, and/or their behavior. It is important to "listen" to these means of expression as well, and honor the messages. People want to be heard, not patronized or controlled. Listen and hear, and take action to honor people's perspectives and support people's choices.
7. **Disrespect people through our language choices and our actions.** We commonly use terms and phrases that lend themselves to the dehumanization and stigmatization of people with disabilities such as "retard, idiot, spaz, lame, crazy," and many others. And not surprisingly, we support policies and procedures at work, in our government, and in our communities, that do not acknowledge the value of everyone and our inter-connectedness. In all that you say and do, consider the outcome for people with disabilities. Ask yourself, "Does this demonstrate respect, and foster dignity and life quality?" After all, disability is the one minority group that you could join at any time.

How to Stop DISabling People:

1. **Model an inclusive mindset for children. Embrace everyone, no matter how different, in academic settings and beyond.**

- 2. Create flexible jobs and accommodations, when needed, and hire people with disabilities.**
- 3. Include all people in your social arenas and provide any accommodations they might need to feel welcome and valued.**
- 4. Be conscious of people's need for access to environments, and don't create barriers.**
- 5. Always presume competence and interact with people in a way that emits respect, dignity, and empowerment.**
- 6. Listen and hear, and take action to honor people's perspectives and support people's choices.**
- 7. In all that you say and do, consider the outcome for people with disabilities. Ask yourself, "Does this demonstrate respect, and foster dignity and life quality?"**



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