

Common Myths and Misconceptions About Disability

Myths, stereotypes and stigma about disability are barriers to the realization of the human rights of people with disabilities.

Disabled Peoples' International

Myths and misconceptions about disability are common. These incorrect assumptions are often triggered by fear, lack of understanding and/or prejudice. Common myths and stereotypes that emerge repeatedly in society include the following assumptions.



Myth: A person's disability defines who they are as an individual.

People often label individuals with a disability according to their condition or limitations. It is common in our daily lives to hear references such as "the disabled" or "the epileptic." Individuals with disabilities are people first. Remember our only label should be our name.



Myth: People with disabilities are sick and in constant pain.

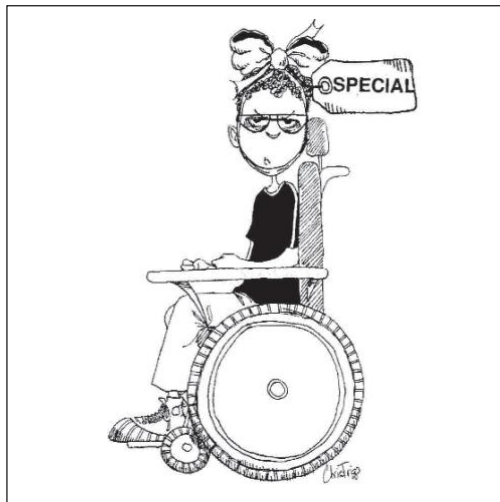
People with disabilities are like people without disabilities. People get sick on occasion or sometimes may be in pain. People with disabilities typically do not suffer or experience pain due to their condition.





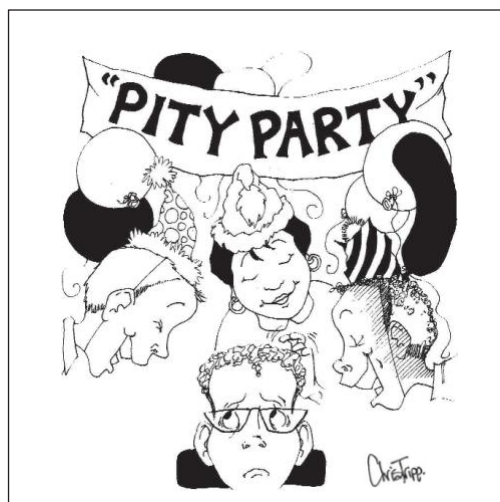
Myth: People with disabilities are brave, courageous and inspirational for living with their disability.

People with disabilities are often portrayed as superhuman or courageous as they triumph over adversity. George Covington, a writer who is blind, has said, "We're seen as inspirational, and inspiration sells like hotcakes. My disability isn't a burden: having to be so damned inspirational is."



Myth: People with disabilities are special and should be treated differently.

The label of "special" in reference to a person with a disability does not convey equality. Expectations for success should not be underestimated to accommodate the "special" label that is associated with people with disabilities.



Myth: Disability is a personal tragedy and deserves our pity.

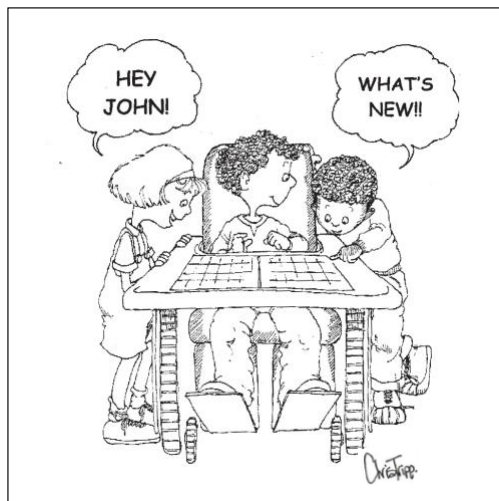
Disability is often viewed as an unending burden. People with disabilities are often viewed as tragic figures whom society should pity. Disability does not mean a poor quality of life. It is often the negative attitudes of society and the lack of accessibility within the community that are the real tragedy.





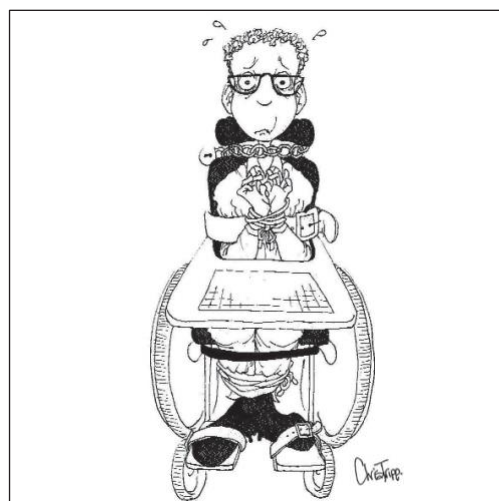
Myth: People with disabilities are dependent and always need help.

All of us may have difficulty doing some things and may require assistance. People with disabilities may require help on occasion; however, disability does not mean dependency. It is always a good strategy not to assume a person with a disability needs assistance. Just ask!



Myth: People with disabilities want to associate with each other.

Relationships and friendships are a matter of personal choice. People with disabilities may share similar characteristics; however, it should not be assumed that everyone wants to associate or develop friendships with each other.



Myth: People are confined to their wheelchair.

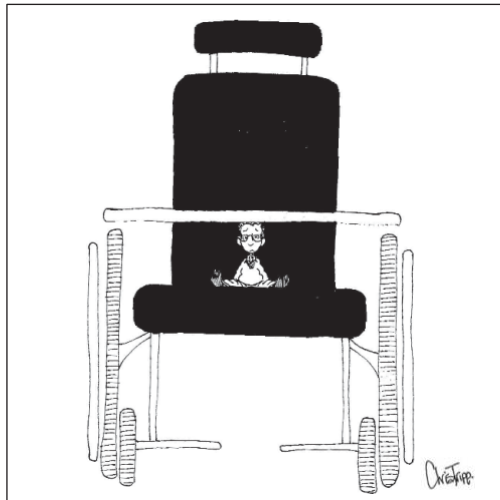
People with disabilities typically do not view themselves as "confined" to their wheelchair. In the same way, a person without a disability is not described as confined to their car. A wheelchair, like an automobile, is a form of mobility that contributes to a person's independence.





Myth: People with disabilities are a one-dimensional group.

There are societal assumptions that tend to view people with disabilities as a one-dimensional group who all have the same needs, interests and opinions. People with disabilities reflect the same diversity that exists in the rest of society, including varying social, economic, cultural, family and educational characteristics. The viewpoints expressed by an individual with a disability are not representative of those of all people with disabilities.



Myth: People with disabilities cannot lead a full and productive life.

People with disabilities are capable of fully participating in community life. The challenge is to focus on a person's ability, not their limitations. Researchers at Dawson College and MacKay Centre in Montreal remind us: "Mechanics who are blind, nurses who are wheelchair users, teachers who are hard of hearing, painters without arms, and chemists with shaky limbs - it's all been done!"

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