

Exploding the stereotype

What's the first thing that comes to mind?

what do you see first?

The physical problem?

The different behavior

The seeing eye dog?

The wheelchair?

We all face some form of stereotype and individuals with disability are no exception.

Misinformation and misunderstanding often perpetuate attitudes which promote stigma and stereotype. Through education and challenging your own beliefs, you too, can begin to see beyond a person's disability.

Some myths and facts about people with disabilities ...

Myth 1: People with disabilities are more comfortable "with their own kind."

Fact: Years of grouping people with disabilities in separate schools and institutions has reinforced this misconception. Today, more and more people with disabilities are taking advantage of new opportunities and are successfully living and working in their communities.

Myth 2: All persons who have a disability are chronically ill or sickly.

Fact: The association between disability and illness has probably evolved through people with disabilities living in institutions and hospitals, even when they were not in need of medical care. Today, most people with disabilities live, work and are involved in their communities.

Myth 3: People with disabilities are brave and courageous.

Fact: Adjusting to a disability actually requires adapting to a lifestyle, not bravery and courage.

Myth 4: Non-disabled people are obligated to "take care of" their fellow citizens with disabilities.

Fact: People may offer assistance to whomever they choose, but most people with disabilities prefer to be responsible for themselves.

Myth 5: The lives of people with disabilities are totally different from those of non-disabled people.

Fact: People with disabilities go to school, get married, work, have families, do laundry, grocery shop, laugh, cry, pay taxes, get angry, have prejudices, vote, plan, and dream, etc. like everyone else.

Myth 6: People with disabilities always need help.

Fact: Many people with disabilities are quite independent and capable of giving help. If you want to help someone with a disability, ask first to see if they need it.

Myth 7: Wheelchair use is confining; users of wheelchairs are "wheelchair-bound."

Fact: A wheelchair, like a bicycle or an automobile, is a personal assistive device that enables someone to get around. Many wheelchair users compete in athletic activities.

Myth 8: All persons with hearing disabilities can read lips.

Fact: Lip-reading skills vary greatly among people with use them and they are never wholly reliable. Persons with hearing disabilities may use a variety of communication methods and may have different levels of proficiency in each method. It is important to find out from the individual what communication style they prefer. Some individuals with a hearing disability may communicate using sign language and sign language interpreters are available to help facilitate communication.

Myth 9: People who are blind acquire a sixth sense.

Fact: Although most people who are blind develop their remaining senses more fully, they do not have a sixth sense.

Myth 10: People who have a mental illness are violent.

Fact: The perception that people with a psychiatric disability are violent is totally wrong. Violence among people with mental illness is extremely rare. More often, they are the victims of crime. (Adapted from: Mental Illness: Information for Writers, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill.)

Adapted from: Awareness: The First Step towards Change: Tips for Disability Awareness.