

## **Myths and Facts About People with Disabilities**

Everybody's fighting some kind of stereotype, and people with disabilities are no exception. The difference is that barriers people with disabilities face begin with people's attitudes — attitudes often rooted in misinformation and misunderstandings about what it's like to live with a disability.

### **Myth 1: People with disabilities are brave and courageous.**

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

### **Myth 2: All persons who use wheelchairs are chronically ill or sickly.**

Fact: The association between wheelchair use and illness may have evolved through hospitals using wheelchairs to transport sick people. A person may use a wheelchair for a variety of reasons, none of which may have anything to do with lingering illness.

### **Myth 3: Wheelchair use is confining; people who use wheelchairs are "wheelchair-bound."**

Fact: A wheelchair, like a bicycle or an automobile, is a personal assistive device that enables someone to get around.

### **Myth 4: All persons with hearing disabilities can read lips.**

Fact: Lip-reading skills vary among people who use them and are never entirely reliable.

### **Myth 5: 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 6: People with disabilities are more comfortable with "their own kind."**

Fact: In the past, grouping people with disabilities in separate schools and institutions reinforced this misconception. Today, many people with disabilities take advantage of new opportunities to join mainstream society.

### **Myth 7: Non-disabled people are obligated to "take care of" people with disabilities.**

Fact: Anyone may offer assistance, but most people with disabilities prefer to be responsible for themselves.

### **Myth 8: Curious children should never ask people about their disabilities.**

Fact: Many children have a natural, uninhibited curiosity and may ask questions that some adults consider embarrassing. But scolding curious children may make them think having a disability is "wrong" or "bad." Most people with disabilities won't mind answering a child's question.

**Myth 9: The lives of people with disabilities are totally different than the lives of people without disabilities.**

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 like everyone else.

**Myth 10: It is all right for people without disabilities to park in accessible parking spaces, if only for a few minutes.**

Fact: Because accessible parking spaces are designed and situated to meet the needs of people who have disabilities, these spaces should only be used by people who need them.

**Myth 11: Most people with disabilities cannot have sexual relationships.**

Fact: Anyone can have a sexual relationship by adapting the sexual activity. People with disabilities can have children naturally or through adoption. People with disabilities, like other people, are sexual beings.

**Myth 12: People with disabilities always need help.**

Fact: Many people with disabilities are independent and capable of giving help. If you would like to help someone with a disability, ask if he or she needs it before you act.

**Myth 13: There is nothing one person can do to help eliminate the barriers confronting people with disabilities.**

Fact: Everyone can contribute to change. You can help remove barriers by:

- Understanding the need for accessible parking and leaving it for those who need it

- Encouraging participation of people with disabilities in community activities by using accessible meeting and event sites

- Understanding children's curiosity about disabilities and people who have them

- Advocating a barrier-free environment

- Speaking up when negative words or phrases are used about disability

- Writing producers and editors a note of support when they portray someone with a disability as a "regular person" in the media

- Accepting people with disabilities as individuals capable of the same needs and feelings as yourself, and hiring qualified disabled persons whenever possible