

# Attitudinal Barriers about People with Disabilities

**Inferiority** Belief that the individual is a “second class citizen” because of his or her disability.

**Fear** Worry that one will do or say the wrong thing around someone with a disability. Avoiding people with disabilities.

**Hero Worship** Considering someone with a disability who lives independently or accomplishes a certain task to be brave or “special”, even if it is a daily task.

**Ignorance** Assuming people with disabilities are incapable of tasks without giving them a chance to display their skills or try.

**The Spread Effect** Belief that a person’s disability negatively affects other senses, abilities, personality traits, or that the total person is impaired.

**Stereotypes** The positive and negative generalizations that people form about people with disabilities.

**Backlash** Belief that people with disabilities are given unfair advantages, such as easier work requirements or behavioral standards.

**Denial** Belief that a “hidden” disability, such as learning or psychiatric disabilities, is not legitimate and does not need

accommodations.

**Menaces** People with disabilities are dangerous or inconvenient and not people to have around.

**Objects of Pity** The belief that people with disabilities deserve pity or sympathy because of the 'misfortune' of their disability. Patronizing or feeling sorry for the person with a disability.

**Sickness** Individuals with disabilities are all ill in some way.

**Burdens of Charity** People with disabilities are a drag on resources and completely dependent on others.

**Objects of Ridicule** The attitude that people with disabilities are freaks, weirdo, geeks, "retards", or people to make fun of because of how they look, act, speak, eat, walk, etc.

**Eternal Children** The belief that someone with a disability will never be able to grow and develop into an adult, both mentally and/or physically.

**Holy Innocents** People with disabilities shouldn't be held accountable for their actions or choices because they just don't know any better. For example, that all people with Down syndrome are sweet natured and innocent.

**Invisible** Attitude that you can "talk over" or ignore the person with a disability – they are not really able to participate anyway.

**No Choice** People with disabilities need to have other people make their decisions for them.

**Segregation** Belief that people with disabilities should be segregated or separated from the rest of society.

### **Tips for Overcoming Attitudinal Barriers:**

Avoid making assumptions about what a person can or cannot do OR what he or she would or would not like to do. Ask the person.

When speaking with a person with a disability, talk directly to that person, not through his or her companion or parent. Extend common courtesies to people with disabilities as you would anyone else. Do not be ashamed of your attempt, in most cases the person will tell you if they are unable to shake your hand, etc.

If a person has a speech impairment and you are having trouble understanding what he or she is saying, ask the person to repeat rather than pretend you understand. This is more respectful and leads to accurate communication. Also, if appropriate, you can ask the person to show you or communicate his or her message in a different way (i.e., write it down, draw a picture, etc.).

Offer assistance to a person with a disability, but wait until your offer is accepted before you help. It is okay to feel

nervous or uncomfortable around people with disabilities and its okay to admit that. It is human to feel that way at first. When you encounter these situations, think “person first” instead of disability.

**Recognize your own attitudinal barriers in order to help others with theirs.**