

feeling



comfortable

with people who have disabilities

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE WORLD ONE RELATIONSHIP AT A TIME.

WHEN YOU ARE WITH A PERSON WHO HAS A DISABILITY:

Show the individual the same respect that you wish to be treated with.

Offer, but do not force, your assistance. Speak naturally and talk directly to the person—do not speak through others.

Feel free to invite people with disabilities to participate fully in church and social events and to share their talents and gifts. They may need encouragement and assurances that their presence and services are needed and wanted, and like all other people, they have the right to say no.

Allow people with disabilities to do things for themselves if they so desire, even if it takes longer.

Encourage those with developmental disabilities to do all they can at their own pace.

Be aware of barriers that prevent people with disabilities from full participation, and work to eliminate those barriers.

Introduction

One in five Americans has a disability. A disability limits a person either physically or mentally. This includes people who have conditions and diagnoses that are known as intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Many people still regard those who have disabilities as lesser people – to be pitied, feared or ignored. These attitudes may arise from a lack of knowledge about disabilities, an unwillingness to challenge the attitudes of peers, or from a fear of doing or saying the wrong thing.

Often we feel guilty about such fears, and that makes us uncomfortable. In this booklet, we have included suggestions on how to interact with people who have disabilities; how to look beyond a person's disability and see the ability, the individual; and how to feel comfortable as you welcome people to your church, involve them in community life, and enjoy new friendships.

There are many ways to include someone who has a developmental disability in your life. Invite someone with disabilities to join your group, or social hour; sit next to them in church; or volunteer to help at a recreational activity at a local service organization.

Developmental and Intellectual Disability

These terms mean a person has a severe, chronic disability that affects their mental abilities, physical abilities or both. It begins before a person is 22 and is likely to continue their entire life. Because of the disability, the person has limitations in their ability to do things independently and will need assistance from others.

Intellectual disability is not something you have, like blue eyes, or a bad heart. Nor is it something you are, like short, or thin.

It is not a medical disorder, nor a mental disorder.

Intellectual disability is a particular state of functioning that begins in childhood and is characterized by limitations in both intelligence and adaptive skills.

It can be caused by any condition that impairs brain development before birth or during the childhood years. Three main causes are Down syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome and Fragile X syndrome.

Most causes are unknown, but can be categorized as genetic – inherited abnormal genes or chromosomal anomalies, or problems during pregnancy, birth or early childhood, such as malnutrition, diseases or injuries.

WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS DEVELOPMENTAL AND INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES:

Choose topics you think will interest the person.

Be clear and concise.

Don't be condescending. Talk to a person as a person; talk to adults as adults.

Talk with the person even though he or she may not be able to respond verbally.

WHEN TALKING OR WRITING ABOUT SOMEONE WHO HAS A DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY:

Use "people first" language — e.g. people with developmental disabilities. Never use the name of the disability as a noun in reference to an individual— e.g. "the disabled."

WHEN WITH A PERSON WHO HAS CEREBRAL PALSY:

Speak directly to the individual, not to their friend or companion.

Be patient and allow the person enough time to complete tasks independently.

Think of ways to modify activities so a person with a disability can participate.

When offering help, first ask what help is needed.

IF AN INDIVIDUAL HAS A SEIZURE:

Keep calm, and reassure other people who may be nearby. Keep crowds away.

Help the person lie down comfortably—turn the person on the side to prevent choking on saliva. Some individuals may not be able to swallow and their lips may move, so tiny bubbles may appear at the mouth.

Clear the area of hard, sharp objects which could injure the person. Place a pillow or a folded coat under the person's head.

Loosen tight clothing, especially around the neck, that may make breathing difficult.

Remember that the person may not breathe well, and that skin color may be affected.

Do not force anything between the teeth. It is not true that a person having a seizure can swallow his or her tongue. Efforts to hold the tongue down can injure teeth.

Call for medical help if: breathing stops; the seizure lasts longer than five minutes; the person continues to have one seizure after another; or the person becomes injured. Don't attempt artificial respiration unless the person does not resume breathing after the seizure.

After the seizure, the person may be confused and should not be left alone.

Cerebral palsy

Cerebral palsy is a condition that affects body movement and muscle coordination. The effects may vary from severe to mild, depending on which part of the brain is involved. In some instances the condition is barely noticeable; in others, the person may be unable to speak, may not have the use of their hands or may be unable to walk. Most people with cerebral palsy have normal intelligence.

An estimated 500,000 adults and children in the U.S. have cerebral palsy. Some causes of cerebral palsy are prenatal infections, lack of oxygen during birth or head injury during or shortly after birth.

Epilepsy

According to the Epilepsy Foundation's national office, epilepsy is a generic term used to define a variety of seizure disorders. A seizure is a disturbance in the electrical activity of the brain. A person with recurring seizures is said to have epilepsy.

Most seizures last only a few minutes, and many individuals receive enough warning to avoid injury. Most seizures can be controlled or prevented with medication.

Nearly 2.5 million people in the U.S. have epilepsy, 30% are under the age of 18. Causes include head trauma and brain tumors. However, in over 70% of all cases, no cause can be found.

Deafness

Deafness refers to hearing loss that prevents understanding speech through the ear – it can be mild to profound.

Deafness may be caused by damage to various parts of the ear or can occur if the ear does not develop properly. Diseases like measles or mumps, head injuries and loud noises can also injure the ear, causing hearing loss.

Deafness can also be inherited. Persons may experience a hearing loss as they grow older. Hearing loss related to aging generally affect men more than women.

Signs of hearing loss, especially in older individuals, may include speaking in an unusually loud or soft voice, accusing others of mumbling, inappropriately answering questions or withdrawing from social participation.

Not all hearing problems are alike. Sometimes a hearing loss is temporary; other times it is permanent. The extent of the hearing loss determines the effect on a person's ability to process sound and understand speech.

WHEN COMMUNICATING WITH A PERSON WHO HAS HEARING LOSS:

Before speaking, get his or her attention by tapping him or her on the shoulder or forearm or wave your hand slightly.

Look directly at the person to whom you are speaking.

Speak at a moderate rate—the person may wish to lip read. Note that not all of the English language is visible on the lips, and many of the visible letters look the same.

Use of sign language, miming, gesturing, etc., is encouraged to help with lip reading abilities.

Be patient, you may have to repeat yourself if you are not understood the first time.

Talk directly to the person, even if a sign language interpreter is present

Be aware of false interpretations. A nod of the head does not necessarily mean, "I understand."

Ask the individual to repeat their message if you don't understand. Do not pretend to understand.

WHEN YOU ARE WITH A PERSON WHO HAS BLINDNESS:

Speak directly to the person, using a normal tone of voice. Blindness does not affect hearing.

Say the person's name before speaking. Identify yourself the first time you speak.

Do not be afraid to use terms such as "see you soon."

Never hold the person's arm while walking. Let him/her hold your arm. This will let the individual walk slightly behind you, and the motion of your body tells the person what to expect. Ask if the person would like verbal cues as to what is ahead.

Be specific when giving directions. If the person must make a turn, state whether it should be left or right.

Avoid escalators or revolving doors, if possible.

Assist the individual on stairs by guiding a hand to a bannister, if the person desires this (ask first). When giving assistance with seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat.

The two biggest barriers for people with blindness are transportation and printed materials that are not available in Braille or audio formats.

Blindness

People with blindness rely on their other senses to perceive the world around them. Blindness varies. Some people may have no vision or only minimal vision. Others may have "low vision" or "partial sight." Low vision refers to limited distance vision. People with low vision are able to see items close to them. They use a combination of vision and other senses to learn or read, although they may require special lighting, larger print, magnifiers and special glasses.

Vision loss can also include blurred, hazy sight and loss of peripheral (side) vision.

The rate at which vision loss occurs in the general population increases considerably with age, especially after 65. The average incidence is 33 per 1,000.

Talk to someone with a developmental disability just like you would anyone else. Be genuine and honest with them. People with disabilities have likes and dislikes, wants and needs, just like you do.

Learning disabilities

A learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. This “invisible disability” may affect a person’s ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical calculations. It is not a developmental disability.

Hyperactivity, inattention, perceptual and coordination problems may also be associated with learning disabilities, but are not examples of the disorder. Other symptoms may include uneven test performance, short attention span, poor memory, impulsiveness, low tolerance for frustration, problems with hand-eye coordination and problems in handling day to day situations. This may result in low self-esteem, as well as behavioral and social difficulties.

Learning disabilities may mildly, moderately or severely impair the learning process.

Learning disabilities are lifelong conditions, but should not be confused with mental retardation or mental illness. Learning disabilities do not include learning problems associated with visual or hearing loss, motor disabilities, or disadvantages due to environmental or economic conditions.

WHEN YOU ARE IN CONTACT WITH SOMEONE WHO HAS A LEARNING DISABILITY:

Offer encouragement and acceptance.

Take note of the things they do correctly and praise them.

If giving directions or instructions, keep them simple and direct and involve as many different senses as possible.

Recognize the individual’s limitations, and be patient, flexible and realistic.

Learn what they are interested in and provide opportunities for involvement and sharing.

WAYS TO HELP PEOPLE WITH AUTISM UNDERSTAND WHAT IS SAID TO THEM:

You can limit the amount of words you use to communicate, but still convey the relevant information.

Use key words that are specific to the context of the situation, repeat and stress them and use gesture, such as pointing, to accompany them.

Pause between spoken words and phrases. This allows the person time to process what has been said gives them the opportunity to think of a response.

Use gestures to accompany language. For example, when offering a drink, you gesture the action of drinking by pretending to hold a glass in one hand and bringing it their mouth as if they were taking a sip. A similar thing can be used for eating.

Over exaggerated facial expressions can also be used, along with shaking the head for “yes” and “no” and a waving of the hand for “hello” and “goodbye.”

Other visual methods that can be used to increase understanding include pictures, drawings, and cue cards.

Autism

Autism, which affects thought, perception and attention, is a broad spectrum of disorders that ranges from mild to severe and causes abnormal responses to a combination of senses.

This lack of responsiveness may be accompanied by an inability to communicate appropriately, and by a persistent failure to develop two way social relationships. The language skills may be poor, even nonexistent, sometimes repeating words or phrases in place of normal language or using gestures and pointing instead of words.

People who have developmental disabilities are like everyone else, just with more specific needs.

Physical disabilities and mobility loss

As a result of spinal cord injury, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, arthritis, cerebral palsy, polio, aging and a variety of other conditions, 1.4 million people in the U.S. use wheelchairs.

Others depend on crutches, walkers, braces or canes to gain mobility.

WHEN YOU ARE WITH A PERSON USING A WHEELCHAIR:

Talk directly to the person, not someone with them.

If possible, sit so that you are at eye level with the person.

Push a wheelchair only after asking the person if assistance is needed.

In guiding a wheelchair down an incline, grasp the handles so the chair does not go too fast.

For more than one stair, keep the chair tilted back at all times.

In buffet or cafeteria lines, ask the individual what help is wanted. Offer to carry the person's plate.

Do not lean on the wheelchair.

Do not act embarrassed by the person's disability or ignore the individual.

Do not move crutches, walkers, canes or wheelchairs without the permission of the individual, and do not leave without returning them to the person or arranging for their return.

An assistive device does not mean the person is incapable of conversations about subjects of mutual interest.

Do not talk about being "confined" to a wheelchair. Wheels give the person freedom.

Resources

American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD)

501 3rd Street, NW Suite 200

Washington, DC 20001

1-800-424-3688

www.aaid.org

The ARC of the United States

1010 Wayne Ave., Suite 650

Silver Spring, Md. 20910

301.565.3842

www.thearc.org

National Christian Resource Center

Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services, Inc.

600 Hoffmann Drive

Watertown, WI 53094

800.369.4636, ext. 3418

www.blhs.org

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)

P.O. Box 1492

Washington, D.C. 20013

800.695.0285

www.nichcy.org

National Organization on Disability

910 16th St. NW, Suite 600

Washington, D.C. 20006

202.293.5960

www.nod.org



Lutheran Homes and Services, Inc.

There are differences everywhere you look. Different shapes, sizes and colors. The same can be said for people. There are many things that make each of us different from one another. A disability is just one of the many things that make each of us different. But, one particular characteristic does not and should not define a person. The way we treat people with intellectual and developmental disabilities should be no different than the way we treat others who are different in other ways, such as color, height or the clothes we wear.

Bethesda Lutheran Homes and Services, Inc. has offered Christ-centered supports to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities since 1904. Bethesda's staff focuses on meeting the spiritual, educational, physical and emotional needs of the thousands of people we support, in America and around the world. Bethesda also offers high quality secular and religious training resources that are effective, cost efficient and convenient. Please see our web site for the many ways that you and your congregation can enrich the lives of people with developmental disabilities in your community.

600 Hoffmann Drive, Watertown, WI 53094
1.800.364.4636 / www.blhs.org