DISABILITY ADVOCACY 101

Disability Resource Center
University of Louisville

Definition of Disability

"A physical or mental impairment that significantly limits one or more major life activities" (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990).
What constitutes a major life activity?

- Seeing
- Hearing
- Walking
- Standing
- Lifting
- Speaking
- Learning
- Reading
- Concentrating
- Thinking
- Communicating
- Much more!

Apparent Disabilities

You may be able to determine that some individuals have a disability from seeing or casually interacting with them. For example:

- Blindness - An individual who is blind may be seen utilizing a cane or a service dog to navigate around campus.
- Deafness - An individual who is deaf may be seen utilizing an American Sign Language interpreter in class.
- Physical Disability - An individual with a physical disability may be seen utilizing a wheelchair to move around campus.

Hidden Disabilities

More often, you will not be able to determine that an individual has a disability by seeing or casually interacting with them. Disabilities of this type are sometimes referred to as hidden disabilities. Examples include:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Learning Disabilities – Reading, Writing, Math, Processing, etc.
- Psychological Disabilities – Depression, Anxiety, Bi-Polar Disorder, etc.
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Chronic Health Conditions – Lupus, Multiple Sclerosis, Diabetes, etc.
- Traumatic Brain Injuries

The vast majority of individuals with disabilities on the University of Louisville campus have hidden disabilities.

Disability Status

Disability differs from many other minority groups in that today you may be part of the majority, but tomorrow you could be in the minority as a person with a disability.
Any one of us could become a person with a disability at some point in our lives. We could develop a psychological disorder, a chronic health condition, or be in an accident which causes a traumatic brain injury or physical disability.

Models of Disability

Medical Model

The Medical Model is the way that society often views people with disabilities. The Medical Model believes:

- Disability is inherently negative and makes a person deficient or abnormal.
- Curing the person and returning them to "normal" is the solution to disability.
- "No one wants to live with a disability, so we must fix them."
- Responsibility is placed on medical professionals to cure a person with a disability rather than on society to be more accessible.

Scholars believe that an overemphasis on the medical model excludes people with disabilities from being full participants in society.

Social Model

The Social Model is the way that people with disabilities often see themselves. The Social Model believes:

- Disability is a difference, like gender, age, or race.
- Having a disability is just a part of the person; it's not good or bad.
- Issues arise from the interaction between the individual and an inaccessible society.
- A change in society will help solve disability-related problems.

Change can come from anyone -- a person with a disability, an advocate, or anybody who believes people with disabilities should be included equally in society.

Disability, the Truth

Watch this video: Disability, the Truth

- What surprised you about the experiences of these individuals?
- Did anything they said make you question any preconceived notions you might have had?
- Did you relate to any of the experiences described?
- Who wasn't represented in this video?

Strategies for Being an Advocate

Person-First vs. Identity-First Language

There are some differences of opinion on the language we should use regarding individuals with disabilities. Many prefer person-first language, which emphasizes that people with disabilities are just that – <u>people</u> who happen to have disabilities. When describing someone as a person with a disability, it is often in good taste to use language that puts the person first. For example:

- Person with a disability
- Person with Autism
- Person who is Deaf

Some members of the disability community prefer identity-first language, language which first identifies the community to which they belong. There is pride that comes from identification with this community, and they prefer to have it mentioned first. For example:

- Disabled person
- Autistic person
- Deaf person

Using appropriate language is a way to demonstrate respect. Asking what type of language the individual prefers or mirroring the language they use about themselves may be best.

The R-Word

Unfortunately, the word "retarded" has not yet been taken out of our culture's vocabulary of insults. Be an advocate by not using this word inappropriately, and spreading the word that its use as an insult is not acceptable.

Watch this video: [Not Acceptable R-Word Public Service Announcement](#)

Recognizing and Reducing Barriers

Sticks

- Sticks in the sidewalk are not a problem for some of us. We might be able to see the stick and step over it. For some persons with disabilities, however, a stick may be a barrier.
- An individual who is blind may not notice the stick and could trip over it. A person who uses a wheel chair may not be able to navigate over or around the stick.
- Reduce this barrier by picking up a stick when you see it on the sidewalk and moving it out of the way.

Bicycles

- Many students, faculty, and staff travel to and around campus on bicycles. We love what this is doing for our environment!
- Bicycles can, however, become a barrier for some persons with disabilities. Never lock you bike on the railing of an access ramp. You could inadvertently be denying access to someone who cannot navigate around your bike!
- Prevent this barrier by always locking your bike on one of the provided bike racks.

Scooters
- Electric scooters have become very popular on campus, but can create a barrier for individuals with disabilities if not used sensibly.
- Parking a scooter blocking a sidewalk, curb cut, or doorway can prevent someone who uses a wheelchair from being able to use that route. It can also become a tripping hazard for someone who cannot see.

Service Dogs
- Some people with disabilities may use a service dog. These dogs are not pets -- they are working animals.
- If you see someone using a service dog, the dog may seem friendly, but you should not pet the dog. Petting a service dog while it is working can undo its training. Only pet a service dog if you have been given permission by its owner.

Tables
- The Disability Resource Center sometimes places tables in classrooms for students with disabilities to use. The table will be marked with a sign stating where it should be and when it is being used.
- If the table has not been placed for you, do not use it during the designated time. Please do not remove the table from the room.
- Also, if you notice someone having difficulty navigating in a room full of desks, offer to help.

Universal Design

Universal Design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. Universal Design for Instruction principles include:
- Flexibility in use
  - Example: A museum allows each visitor to choose to read or listen to a description of the contents of display cases.
- Simple and intuitive
  - Example: Control buttons on science equipment are labeled with text and symbols that are simple and intuitive to understand.
- Perceptible information
  - Example: A video presentation projected includes captions.
- Tolerance for error
  - Example: The "undo" feature on a word processor allows the user to easily correct mistakes.
- Low physical effort
  - Example: Doors to a lecture hall open automatically for people with a wide variety of physical characteristics.
- Size and space for approach and use
  - Example: An event space that is designed with ample room for individuals to navigate around, whether they are walking or using a mobility device.

Event Planning

As a student, faculty, or staff member, does your department or student organization ever hold events? If so, this is an excellent opportunity to use universal design and be an advocate! Planning your events with accessibility in mind prevents unintended barriers to access and shows individuals with disabilities that they are welcome.

When Planning Your Event

- Identify funding sources for accommodations that involve a cost.
- Make all accessibility arrangements well in advance of the event.
- Feel free to contact the Disability Resource Center at (502) 852-6938 for assistance in planning an accessible event.

When Making Event Arrangements

- Designate a person who will be responsible for any accommodation requests.
- Put a standard "accessibility contact statement" on all your publicity, including flyers, print ads, web pages, radio, and TV spots. The statement should invite persons who require accommodations to make requests by contacting the designated person. Here is a sample "accessibility contact statement":
- "If you have a disability and require accommodation to participate in this event, please make your request by contacting Mary Jones at 555-5555 or (email address). Please make your request by (specific date) to allow sufficient time to secure the requested accommodations."
- Schedule events in wheelchair accessible buildings and rooms.
- Be sure that attendees have easy access to accessible restrooms.
- Be sure that attendees have access to appropriate parking.
- Provide seating toward front of room for attendees who are using sign language interpreters or real-time captionists.
- Situate sign language interpreters near the event speaker and within clear sight of deaf attendee(s) so that both the speaker and the interpreter can be viewed simultaneously.
- Provide advance copies of written materials and outlines for sign language interpreters when possible.
- When possible, all media shown (videos, etc.) should be captioned for viewing by persons who are deaf.
- Be prepared to provide materials in alternative format upon request (preferably before the scheduled event). Alternative format (such as Braille, large print, or electronic version) may be required by persons who are blind or visually impaired.

When Configuring Your Event Setup

- Notify attendees who have requested accommodations that the requested accommodations are in place.
- Identify and publicize the location of accessible restrooms.
- Be sure to walk through your event venue to be sure that automatic door openers and elevators are operational.
- Verify that paths of travel are clear and free of steps for wheelchair access.
- Be aware of lighting or any visual obstructions that could hinder visibility.

Final Steps and Thank You!

Complete this training by telling us one way that you will be an advocate for persons with disabilities on our Disability Advocacy 101 Response. If you are interested in having your name added to our online list of allies, please let us know when you complete the above form. Thank you for participating in this Disability Advocacy 101 module. Your commitment to improving access and making a more inclusive environment for persons with disabilities is greatly appreciated.

Questions?

Contact the Disability Resource Center at 502-852-6938 or askdrc@louisville.edu.