



Myths and Misconceptions of People with Disabilities

1. People who use wheelchairs cannot move and must stay in their chairs.

False: Some people can walk, but their strength may be limited so they use a wheelchair to help them to travel longer distances. Also, some people who use wheelchairs may prefer to move to more comfortable chairs such as those at their desk or in a restaurant.

2. People with a hearing impairment cannot speak.

False: A hearing impairment does not affect the vocal cords, although it can affect a person's ability to hear and monitor the sounds he or she makes. Some people who have hearing impairments make a choice not to use their voice while others choose to speak. The type and degree of hearing loss as well as the age of the person when his or her hearing was lost, also influences speech.

3. People with disabilities live very different lives than people without disabilities.

False: Overall, people with disabilities live the same as you and I. Although, some ways of doing things may be a little bit different depending on the type and severity of a person's disability. For example, people with limited use of their arms and legs can drive, but their car will be fitted with hand controls for gas and brakes and possibly a special handle to grip the steering wheel.

4. People with disabilities can only work at special jobs made just for them.

False: As with all people, certain jobs may be better for some than for others. While there are obvious bad job matches, such as someone with a sight impairment who wants to be a bus driver or someone who has quadriplegia and wants to be a loader for a shipping company, people should not be denied employment opportunities based on the disability they have. Just because you can only think of one way to do something does not mean that other ways do not exist that are equally effective.

5. Most people who have cerebral palsy are less intelligent than the general population.

False: Cerebral Palsy (CP) does not itself affect a person's intelligence. However, at times a person may have CP and another disability such as a Developmental Disability that affects the way his or her brain functions.

6. People who have sight impairments have excellent hearing.

False: A person's vision, or lack of vision, does not affect his or her hearing. However, people who have sight impairments may depend more on their hearing and be more in tune to sounds than someone without a sight impairment.

7. If people have epileptic seizures, you should NOT place something in their mouths to prevent them from "swallowing" their tongues.

True: It is physically impossible to "swallow" one's tongue. Placing something in the mouth of a person who is having a seizure can cause choking. **DO NOT** try to restrain the person; this might cause injury. Instead, move anything hard or sharp out of the way and place something soft and flat under the person's head.

8. People who have developmental disabilities who do not live at home live in institutions.

False: People with disabilities live in all sorts of settings: In their own apartments or houses, alone or with roommates, in group homes or other residential settings that may have up to 15 people living there with paid support staff, in community housing with multiple families and individuals, or in their family home with family members. Some people are still in institutions; however, efforts are underway across the country to move them into community settings.

9. People who have developmental disabilities do not have the same feelings as people without disabilities.

False: All people experience similar emotions, whether they express them the same way or not.

10. People who have hearing impairments do not appreciate music, theater, movies, etc., because they cannot hear.

False: Today many movies and television shows are captioned. "Captioned" means that conversations appear as words on the screen. If a program is *open-captioned*, no special decoder is needed. If a show is *closed captioned*, a television with a decoder is needed. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates that all new televisions 13 inches and larger **MUST** include a built-in caption decoder. Many theaters offer special performances that are interpreted into sign language. Again, the type and degree of hearing loss as well as how old a person was when he or she developed a hearing impairment also influences music appreciation.

Information for myths and misconceptions of people with disabilities obtained from:
www.michigan.gov/mcsc/0,1607,7-137-6118_22503_23185-63417--,00.html , and
<http://ici.umn.edu/yesican/curriculum/lesson.html> .