

## Disability Discrimination Act 1995

# Myths and misconceptions about disability

- Myth** Disability is a devastating personal tragedy.  
**Truth** The lives of disabled people are not tragic. What often disables people is the attitudes they encounter and the environment in which they live and work.
- Myth** Most deaf people can lip read.  
**Truth** For clear and efficient communication many deaf people will need services such as sign language interpreters, lip readers, lip speakers and speech to text.
- Myth** Most disabled people are unable to have relationships.  
**Truth** Many disabled people, like non-disabled people, make choices about marriage, long-term relationships and having children.
- Myth** Disability and illness are interrelated.  
**Truth** Disabled people can get the same illnesses as other people.
- Myth** Disabled people are dependent on others.  
**Truth** Disabled people sometimes need help with some things - too often because of an inadequately designed environment. Nonetheless disabled people strive to be independent.
- Myth** Blind people have a sixth sense.  
**Truth** Some people use and refine their other senses to compensate.
- Myth** Disabled people are courageous.  
**Truth** Disabled people, like non-disabled people, cope with life in their own individual way.
- Myth** Wheelchair users are not mobile.  
**Truth** Wheelchair users do get out and about. Some usually use wheelchairs, others only when necessary.
- Myth** There are disabled people who are 'uneducable'.  
**Truth** Disabled people reflect the same range of academic ability as non-disabled people, with some achieving high qualifications and undertaking high level jobs.

## Terminology - a brief guide for managers and trainers

Some terms that are used may cause offence to disabled people. This factsheet gives some examples of words and phrases which should be avoided and their alternatives.

Do not use	Use
'Handicapped' - (Some people see the term 'handicapped' as meaning 'cap in hand' (i.e. seeking charity) or 'the disabled' - ('the disabled' implies disabled people are part of a group rather than individuals)	'Disabled people' or 'people with disabilities'
'Cripple' or 'deformed'	'disabled person' or 'person with disability' or 'physical disability'
'Mental handicap' or 'retarded'	'learning disabilities'
'Dwarf' or 'midget'	'a person with restricted growth'
'Deaf and dumb'	'deaf without speech'
'Spastic'	'someone with cerebral palsy'
'Stammerer'	'someone with a speech impairment'

- Put the **person first**, for example 'John Smith, who uses a wheelchair instead of 'wheelchair user, John Smith'.
- Remember that people are **not medical conditions**, so do not give them labels, such as 'epileptics', 'suffering from', 'afflicted by' or 'invalids'.
- Toilets which have been designed for use by disabled people should be referred to as '**accessible toilets**' rather than 'disabled toilets'.
- If you need to make reference to someone with limited or no sight, use '**visual impairment**', 'blind' or 'partially sighted'.

## Further Help?

Other factsheets in this series on employing disabled people are available from:

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland  
Information and Advice Department  
Equality House,  
7-9 Shaftesbury Square  
Belfast BT2 7DP  
Telephone: 028 90 500 600  
Textphone: 028 90 500 589  
Fax: 028 90 248 687  
Email: [information@equalityni.org](mailto:information@equalityni.org)  
Website: [www.equalityni.org](http://www.equalityni.org)