

Factsheet 1

Understanding Disability

Definitions:

Impairment is...

Impairment is the loss of function or ability of an individual's body.

The word 'impairment' is used to describe the reasons why people are considered to be disabled. Examples of impairments are physical, sensory conditions, emotional / mental distress, a learning difficulty etc.

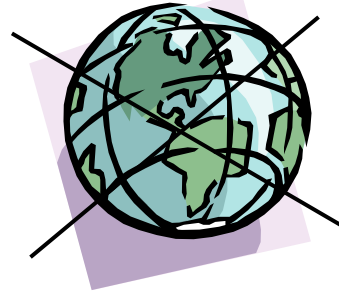
Although impairment is not an ideal word there needs to be a way of describing what it is about Disabled People that forms the basis of their social exclusion and discrimination.



Disability is...

Disability arises from discrimination on grounds of impairment.

Disability can lead to social exclusion, and a negative cycle of low self esteem, dependency and vulnerability.



Disability = Disabilism

Using the Social Model of Disability you are a Disabled Person if:

“you identify as having an impairment, e.g. a physical or sensory impairment, learning difficulty, health issue, or are different from a perceived norm (this can be hidden or visible). As a consequence of this you may experience discrimination (disabilism) – and it is that which disables you.”

Unfortunately the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) part 1, section 1 (1) defines disability using the traditional model approach:

“a person who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

Section (2) In this Act “disabled person means a person who has a disability.”

Organisations committed to using the Social Model should always use a Social Model definition of disability, except when deciding if an individual is protected under the DDA 1995.

Understanding the Models of Disability

Traditional model	Social model
The 'problem' is the individual Disabled Person's impairment	The 'problem' is how society treats or reacts to people who have an impairment
Not preventable	Preventable
The solution is to find a cure (pressure on individuals to be cured), to provide care or to offer charity	The solution is to stop discrimination and enable Disabled People to access their rights and entitlements

Implications of the Models

Traditional model	Social model
Terminology	
"People with disabilities" "the disabled or the impaired" "able bodied or normal people"	"Disabled People or a person with an impairment" "non-disabled people"
Social Services role	
Respite Care, Day Care or Residential Care – institutionalisation	Personal Assistance Scheme, Independent Living Schemes, Direct Payments
Education	
Segregated schools, mainstreaming	Inclusive schools
Confidence of Disabled People	
Low self-esteem, embarrassed about having an impairment, feeling guilty or a burden	Positive identity, able to identify and to challenge discrimination
Who makes the decisions?	
Professionals are seen as the experts	Professionals work for Disabled People giving them information to make choices and have control

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