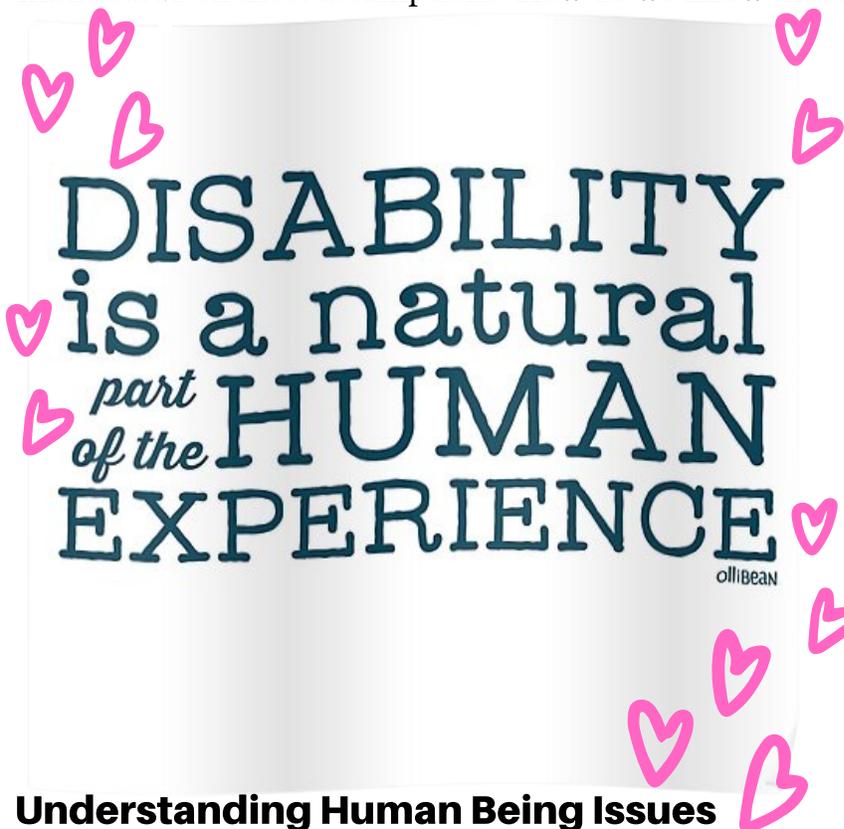


Disability Issue? Human Being Issue?

How many times have we thought, heard or said things like: 1) They're very manipulative – we know children with disabilities learn to be manipulative at an early age. 2) They'll never be able to drive - they have Down Syndrome (or cerebral palsy, or whatever). 3) What do you expect – they have autism (or seizures or whatever). How many times do we make assumptions about persons with disabilities that are based primarily on the person's diagnosis? How many decisions – Life-altering decisions for the person with the disability – have been made based on these assumptions? How do we know that the issue is a consequence of the person's disability?



Understanding Human Being Issues

Many of the situations we deal with are not disability issues, they're human being issues. Any child who is frightened may cry or hide under a desk; any child who's been teased may retaliate by pulling hair or spitting. A person who doesn't have effective oral communication will communicate through their behavior. Is a teen's behavior a consequence of the disability or does it reflect ordinary, hormonal teenage angst? Is an angry outburst related to the disability or is the person stressed because their grandmother recently died? Does a person still need a job coach because of their cognitive disability, or are they not learning the tasks because they hate the job? Is the person having a meltdown because of the disability, or are they just having a bad day (and don't we all have bad days)?

How to Change the Conversation

Start by talking to the person with a disability, and presume competence when doing so. Separating disability issues from human being issues can generate positive change for people with disabilities (and result in more appropriate solutions if solutions are necessary), and can also be incredibly freeing to parents, teachers, staff, etc.: "He's being a five-year-old (or having a bad day or whatever); no worries – this, too, shall pass."

“ Disability is a natural part of the human experience that does not diminish the right of individuals with developmental disabilities to enjoy the opportunity to live independently, enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, and experience full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational mainstream of American society. ”
 - The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act

We are ALL Members of the Human Race!

People with disabilities are more like people without disabilities than different: they feel, they grow, they succeed, they fail; they're human and they have normal human experiences. Let's not mislabel those experiences, and make things worse with inappropriate reactions. Instead, let's recognize and celebrate them for what they are: ordinary and valuable similarities that bind us all together as members of the human race.