



Title	Redefining Disability
Created by	Lisa Handelman, The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington
Intended Audience	Adults, lay leaders and individuals without prior experience working in the area of inclusion
Materials Needed	3 Readings with “thought questions” (pre-arrange for a volunteer to read) – see attached.
Program Description	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leader explains – The purpose of this activity is to provide a time and space to think about inclusion. We all learn in different ways, and each of these readings was written to speak to a different type of learner. Three volunteers will be asked to read a short passage. Think about which reading best corresponds to your own learning style. 2. Ask for the first volunteer to read “that child”. 3. Ask the group the following questions (or others that come to mind). Depending on the size of the group and time allowed for this activity, the group can be asked to just think about the question, think and discuss the question with a partner, or have a full group discussion. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you think of a time you judged “that child” or his/her parents? Or a time you helped others not to judge “that child”? • While our tradition includes the concepts of <i>hanokh lana’ar al pi darko</i> – educate each child based on their way (Proverbs 22:6) and <i>b’tzelem Elohim</i> - all are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27) - why as individuals do we often want everyone to conform or behave in a certain way? 4. Ask for the second volunteer to read “Is it the environment or the person who has the disability?” 5. Ask the group the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does our environment create or exacerbate a disability? • Our tradition teaches that you should not insult the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind (Lev. 19:14) – what can we do to remove the stumbling blocks in our environment and within our own attitudes? 6. Ask the third volunteer to read “facts and figures.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the group the following questions: • What hard evidence do we have that inclusion is increasing? • Our tradition teaches that <i>every member of the people of Israel is obligated to study Torah – whether one is rich or poor, physically able or physically disabled</i> (Maimonides, Mishne Torah), yet the numbers enrolled in our day schools and religious school tell a different story. How can we change this? 7. Ask which reading they related to and how this corresponded to their own learning style? Why is it important to have multiple ways to communicate information?



That Child

We all know *that child*. The preschooler who was always hitting, shoving, pinching, scratching maybe even biting other children. *That child* in school who took up so much of the teacher's time and detracted from your child's learning. *That child* who grew into a teen that other teens rolled their eyes at and excluded because *that child* was not cool, a little weird. We see *that child* in the supermarket and wonder why the parent can't control their behavior and in our houses of worship we shush that child so the service is not interrupted. Who is *that child*? Maybe *that child* needs more attentive parenting. Maybe *that child* has a disability that makes it hard to regulate his or her behavior. Maybe *that child* is just having a bad day? - How can we stop shushing and start welcoming *that child* and their parents into our community without judgment?

Is it the environment or the person who has the disability?

A famous heart surgeon who has saved numerous lives with his highly developed skills and fine motor ability has a very minor accident. He has permanently damaged a small section of his little finger on his non-dominant hand. Due to this injury, he can no longer perform surgery – would you consider this surgeon to have a disability?

If all you knew about Stephen Hawking was that he won numerous medals including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Special Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics and the Albert Einstein Medal and that he wrote several influential books including *A Brief History of Time*, *The Theory of Everything* and *The Grand Design*, would you think he was a man with a disability? If you met Stephen Hawking and you knew nothing about him other than the fact he was sitting in a wheelchair and using a computer to talk, would you think he had a lot to offer?

Why does the young professional who is deaf or hard of hearing keep this fact off her linked-in profile? Why does the young author with a physical disability refuse in-person interviews but is happy to communicate online? Why do parents not disclose their child's disability when they sign up for a school or camp program? Is it because of their disability or because of the way the environment might react to the disability?

Facts and Figures

- According to the U.S. Census, 18.6% of Americans (approximately 1 in 5) have a disability
- 70% of people with disabilities nationwide are out of the workforce.
- Metro Access, a shared paratransit service, requires a 30 minute window on both ends of each trip, is late almost a quarter of the time (22%) during rush hour, covers a limited area and does not provide same day service. It is seen by many as an unreliable form of transportation contributing to the increase of social isolation for individuals with disabilities
- A 2013 study for Jewish Camps reported that 46% of Jews with disabilities who attend overnight Jewish camp report that they have been denied access to other Jewish institutions due to their disability
- According to The Times of Israel (September 30, 2015), the Israeli Defense Forces has more than 200 soldiers with disabilities

Look at your numbers - are individuals with disabilities attending programs you attend; are individuals with disabilities part of your circle of friends? If not, why not –can they get there, do they feel they would be denied access, or are they simply waiting for an invitation?