

# Information Brief

## **Youth Voice: Developing a Social Life**

By: Alex Brown

As kids grow up they are faced with many challenges including the development of a social life outside of school. This is a natural process for kids, but often students with disabilities are left out of the social equation. For children with disabilities there is a barrier between them and most people. However, having a social life is important for a person to be totally healthy. The idea of a social life goes beyond just hanging out with friends. It includes having a girl/boyfriend, developing independence, and being accepted by those people that they are hanging out with.

Most people will ask someone out and be rejected at least once in their lifetime. This could be for a variety of different reasons. A friend of mine was turned down solely because he was in a wheelchair. He deserves to be given a chance as much as anyone else does. People with disabilities are often treated this way. They

are treated this way for a variety of different reasons. A big reason for this is ignorance. People are just ignorant of the struggles and not aware of how valuable a person with a disability can be. People also tend to be scared of anything that is different. Oftentimes, people with disabilities get ignored and are isolated by society and are often not allowed to develop the social skills required to get through life.

Students with invisible disabilities have a hard time too. They are often labeled as stupid and sometimes not given the help needed to succeed. They are segregated, not by choice, and sometimes not taught the same curriculum as every other student. This sets them up for failure on several levels. The first is academically. If they are not taught the same thing as all the other students then what are they being taught? Normally the curriculum is several grade levels under them. This teaches them nothing and when they leave high school they don't have the education that is needed to be as successful as possible.

It also hurts them socially. Not only are they not around their peers without disabilities, but they are not taught the same as their peers and so their peers are more educated when they leave high school. When any student leaves high school they will be placed in

society either in the workforce or college. In this environment people with disabilities will not be segregated. If they have spent all of their school years segregated they may not have developed everyday social skills and may not know how to work with or interact with others in an integrated setting.

This issue goes beyond just the school system. It also sometimes falls on the parents, but parents are not the experts. Up until the child leaves the school system, it is the schools responsibility to provide for the child's needs. Sadly, the school system will normally take the easiest road, even if it means not providing the necessary training for persons with disabilities. Parents and students need to push to be included. Challenge the school system to provide adequate social training that youth need to get by in life.

A big part about having a disability and having a social life is disclosure. The biggest part that this plays is in the workforce. A person with a disability has to express their needs to their employer. An employer can't make any person with a disability tell them all of the accommodations that they need--it is up to the individual--to tell their employer what accommodations they need. A good resource for disclosing at work is put together by Skill: National Bureau for

Students with Disabilities. Their information packet Information: Disclosing your Disability can help students to disclose to their employers.

Another big part of disclosure comes when hanging out with friends. How do you tell a friend that you can't go to a movie because you can't see anything far away? How do you tell your girlfriend/boyfriend that if it's raining you can't go out because your wheelchair malfunctions in the rain? The premier resource of this type of disclosure is the 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities. If you failed to disclose the fact that you were allergic to peanuts and then your friend made you a sandwich and you failed to see that it had peanut butter on it, what would happen? You might just die. Youth need to realize the importance of disclosure as well as the best way to disclose.

In the end disclosure is essential to having a positive social life. Another issue is to knowing your rights. Persons with disabilities were given rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This act provided people with disabilities a variety of rights including access to reasonable accommodations and not allowing a person with a

disability to be discriminated against. It is important that, if a person has a disability, they know what rights they are given under the ADA.

A consequence of the ADA that people don't often think about, is how it opens up more opportunities for people with disabilities to have active social lives.. As effective as it is, there is still a large part that each individual plays also. By knowing what your rights are you are better prepared to use the tools you need to become a better person.

Developing a social life is hard to begin with, but when you have a disability it is made that much harder. A person with a disability must work hard to develop a social life because having a social life is so important. With good social skills, which came along with having a positive social life, a person can more easily make it through life.

## **Resources for Additional Information**

The U.S. Department of Justice's ADA Page:

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>

The 411 on Disability Disclosure

[http://www.ncwd-youth.info/assets/guides/411/411\\_Disability\\_Disclosure\\_complete.pdf](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/assets/guides/411/411_Disability_Disclosure_complete.pdf)

Skill, National Bureau for Students with Disabilities

<http://www.skill.org.uk/info/faqs>

For more information on NCLD-Youth and the work that we do, please contact

Rebecca Hare, Project Coordinator

NCLD-Youth

IEL

4455 Connecticut Ave, NW Suite 310

Washington, DC 20008

202-822-8405 x127

[harer@iel.org](mailto:harer@iel.org)

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