

DISCLAIMER & CONTENT WARNING: Some of the language and terminology used to describe people with disabilities in the past has changed over time, and it's important for us to understand the origins of culturally-accepted language. However, most language related to disability has been (and continues to be) problematic and harmful. For educational purposes only, some of these outdated and offensive terms are present here in this overview. We offer a content warning because this ableist terminology may be traumatizing or triggering for some people. Lifeworks does not use nor endorse the use of these outdated and offensive terms in any context beyond this educational resource.

CONCEPTUAL MODELS	UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS	REAL-LIFE EXAMPLES
<p>CHARITY Depicting disabled people as victims of tragic circumstance who are deserving of pity. Disability is something to be “overcome,” which is “inspirational.”</p>	<p>People with disabilities are dependent on the kindness of a charitable society.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “People with disabilities can’t succeed without help.” • “They are the most inspirational and loyal employees you’ll ever have.”
<p>MEDICAL Viewing disability as a problem of the individual person, directly caused by disease, trauma, or other health conditions that requires sustained medical care.</p>	<p>People with disabilities are dependent on being “fixed” by the medical field.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We should write goals to change diagnosis-related behavior.” • “Let’s increase support because someone can’t ‘act normal.’” • “Support needs will limit the level of access to community.”
<p>EXPERT Regarding “professional experts” as those who identify an impairment and its limitations (using the Medical Model), and then take the action they deem necessary to improve the position of the person with a disability.</p>	<p>People with disabilities are dependent on the acquired knowledge of service professionals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Someone needs to plan and make decisions for people with disabilities.” • “People with disabilities don’t need (or want) equal access to information.”

<p>COMPLIANCE Understanding access as a matter of compliance. Responds to barriers retroactively and individually, missing the chance to ensure disabled people have identical experiences in community.</p>	<p>People with disabilities are dependent on the community's awareness of laws and policies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We have to make sure we don’t get this wrong.” • “Let’s encourage everyone to disclose their disability.” • “There’s a policy; people can ask if they need anything.”
<p>SOCIAL Viewing “disability” as a socially-created problem that requires collective action by society at large to make the modifications necessary for the full inclusion of people with disabilities.</p>	<p>People with disabilities are equal members of society, so inaccessibility is the issue to address.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “People with disabilities are not the problem.” • “What we built does not work for everyone.” • “Solutions should address our inaccessible society more broadly.”
<p>RIGHTS Enacting policy and legislation that seeks to address the issues of social justice and discrimination. Embraces the shift from disability being seen as an individual medical problem to it instead being about community membership and fair access to social activities.</p>	<p>People with disabilities are equal members of society, so laws and policies are needed to ensure their rights.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Disabled people have the same rights as non-disabled people.” • “Laws, policies, and practices need to change.” • “Non-disabled society needs to fix what we’ve built.”

Sources:

[Disabled World - Disability Models](#)

[Disability Resource Center - Framing Disability](#)

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