

On a regular basis, we face change. We're constantly having to adjust to new technology, new rules, or new situations. And the "new"—even though it may be good and/or helpful—may often be inconvenient initially, but it soon becomes ordinary.

Take cell phones, for example. Having the ability to communicate while on the go is good; having to figure out how to use the darn thing correctly (both the technology and the rules for courteous use) can be inconvenient. I just want to make calls; I don't want to learn about all the "options." But I must take the time and make the effort in order to use the phone correctly. Once I've mastered this inconvenience, I'm familiar with the technology and it becomes ordinary.

The same can be true about the inclusion of people with disabilities in schools, jobs, and ordinary community activities. The *idea* of a child being included in a general ed classroom, an adult becoming employed in a real job, or a child/adult participating in a community activity is often rejected by the Gatekeepers, and a multitude of reasons for the rejection may be offered. In many cases, the rejection is based on the belief that it would create an *inconvenience*.

For example, it might be considered inconvenient to modify the curriculum to meet a student's needs, to provide accommodations for a job, or to make alterations to the community activity so that all can participate. But like other perceived inconveniences, once the "new" occurs on a regular basis, it becomes familiar and ordinary.

We shouldn't be surprised when inclusion isn't easily achieved. After all, it's a new and unknown experience for many people—whether they're public school teachers, employers, church members, or anyone else. Many, if not most, new experiences are met with hesitation, trepidation, and maybe even rejection. Furthermore, what did *you* know about children or adults with disabilities before you became personally involved with disability issues? I knew nothing; *I* could have been a teacher or a Scout leader or an employer who rejected the notion of including a person with

## FROM INCONVENIENT

# To Ordinary

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow

[www.disabilityisnatural.com](http://www.disabilityisnatural.com)

a disability within my sphere of influence or responsibility.

When my son, Benjamin, was five, we signed him up for T-ball through our local Parks and Recreation department. I

expected some resistance. I felt sure the coach had no experience with a child who used a wheelchair. When the coach called our home to confirm Benjamin's registration, he said—in words that seemed to have a hard time coming out of his mouth—"We've never done anything like this before." I'm sure he couldn't even *imagine* what this would look like—much less feel confident about doing it—and he probably felt my son's participation would throw a kink (be an inconvenience) in his usual methods of coaching. Anticipating his resistance, I was prepared to defend my son's right to participate, and to quote chapter and verse from the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). But common sense came to my aid, and instead of reacting defensively, I responded in a friendly manner with, "We've never done this either—we'll *learn together!*" Those words sent a positive message of partnership, instead of an adversarial message about "rights" or discrimination.

Once we learned—together—how to ensure Benj could play T-ball with the help of easily-achieved accommodations, the perceived inconvenience was quickly replaced by an ordinary routine. Benj's coach, along with the other coaches, players, parents, and spectators, learned how easy it was to include a child who used a wheelchair. The lessons learned could later be applied to others with disabilities or differences.

The only way to make inclusion happen is to *do it!* There's really no "getting ready" for anyone! Not for a T-ball coach, an employer, a school teacher; nor for a child or adult with a disability. Everyone is ready, right now. *Just do it!* Only then will the "inconvenient" become the "ordinary."

It's kind of like riding a bicycle. The first time you perched precariously on the seat of a bicycle, no one helped you "get ready." Your parents didn't sit you down and teach you about the dynamics of movement or balance or steering, and they probably didn't even

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tell you how to do it. They helped you sit on the seat, told you where to place your feet and hands, and off you went. Like many other things in life, *you learned by doing*. Inclusion—whether in school, at a job, or in a community activity—is the same: we learn by doing.

Becoming successful in riding a bicycle began with a positive belief. Even if *you* didn't believe you could ride your bike, *your parents did!* So it is with inclusion in any setting. Inclusion is, first and foremost, *a state of mind*. If you believe a person with a disability *will be, can be, should be* included, it will happen. Having a *vision* of inclusion will lead to the *reality* of inclusion.

This doesn't mean it will always be easy (but it's often easier than you think). I'm always shocked when, during a presentation on inclusion, someone in the audience denounces the idea with anger or sarcasm, "Well, you make it sound so *easy!*" I don't understand that attitude. Are we justified in not doing something just because it may be hard? Learning to ride a bicycle may have been difficult, but we did it anyway! The same is true for countless situations. Shouldn't we put the same effort into ensuring a person with a disability is able to live a bountiful and ordinary life as a fully-participating, included citizen?

The greatest barrier to inclusion is not a person's disability, but societal attitudes and perceptions (including our own, in many cases). The solution is to "present" inclusion as an *ordinary occurrence*, instead of a right, an entitlement, or even a favor. Everyone is born included! Inclusion is the natural state of being, while segregation is the unnatural, artificial state! Inclusion is a moral and ethical issue—and goes way beyond a legal entitlement. And inclusion will more readily be achieved when a person is presented as an ordinary human being—not as a "special" person and not even as "a person with a disability"!

When we signed Benjamin up for T-ball, we didn't sign him up as a "child with a disability" or a "special needs child." (*Gag!*) We signed him up as "Benjamin, a five-year-old kindergartner." His classmates were excited about playing team sports; Benjamin wanted to do what his friends were doing. We were determined to ensure our son lived an ordinary life; his disability is irrelevant in the big picture! Only *after* Benj was signed up did we talk to the coach about what accommodations and supports were needed for Benj *and his coach* to be successful.

There's no doubt that one day—and I hope it's within my lifetime—inclusion in all areas of society will be achieved. Inclusion will become the rule (ordinary), instead of the exception (inconvenient).

**To believe in something  
not yet proved and  
to underwrite it with our lives:  
it is the only way  
we can leave the future open.**

Lillian Smith

This will *not* occur as a result of legislation (we already have laws that prohibit discrimination based on disability—but they're not always followed). Also, inclusion will *not* occur as a result of widespread training of educators, employers, or others. I've met educators who have attended numerous inclusive ed conferences, yet they still embrace segregation. This doesn't mean training is of no value, it just means we're fooling ourselves if we think inclusion can be achieved only when people are trained in its practice.

In pockets here and there, inclusion is successfully implemented because parents, educators, employment specialists, employers, and others are making the *conscious decision* to do it (even when they're not sure exactly how to make it happen). They do whatever it takes to ensure success, sometimes taking two steps forward and one step back. But they never give up, even when the going gets tough. These brave souls practice determination and a positive attitude as they fine-tune the process of making accommodations, meeting an individual's needs, and more. They learn by doing. In the process, the inclusion of children and adults with disabilities evolves from an inconvenient to an ordinary occurrence. I'm ready for inclusion to become a reality, aren't you?