

# A Credo for Support

Throughout history, people with physical and mental disabilities have been abandoned at birth, banished from society, used as court jesters, drowned and burned during the Inquisition, gassed in Nazi Germany, and still continue to be segregated, institutionalized, tortured in the name of behavior management, abused, raped, euthanized, and murdered. Now, for the first time, people with disabilities are taking their rightful place as fully contributing citizens. The danger is that we will respond with remediation and benevolence rather than equity and respect. And so, we offer you

## A Credo for Support

Do not see my disability as a problem.

Recognize that my disability is an attribute.

Do not see my disability as a deficit.

It is you who see me as deviant and helpless.

Do not try to fix me because I am not broken.

Support me. I can make my contribution to the community in my own way.

Do not see me as your client. I am your fellow citizen.

See me as your neighbor. Remember, none of us can be self-sufficient.

Do not try to modify my behavior. Be still and listen. What you define as inappropriate may be my attempt to communicate with you in the only way I can.

Do not try to change me, you have no right.

Help me learn what I want to know.

Do not hide your uncertainty behind "professional" distance.

Be a person who listens, and does not take my struggle away from me by trying to make it all better.

Do not use theories and strategies on me.

Be with me. And when we struggle with each other, let that give rise to self-reflection.

Do not try to control me. I have a right to my power as a person.

What you call noncompliance, or manipulation may actually be the only way I can exert some control over my life.

Do not teach me to be obedient, submissive, and polite.

I need to feel entitled to say NO if I am to protect myself.

Do not be charitable towards me.

The last thing the world needs is another Jerry Lewis.

Be my ally against those who exploit me for their own gratification.

Do not try to be my friend. I deserve more than that.

Get to know me. We may become friends.

Do not help me, even if it makes you feel good. Ask me if I need your help.

Let me show you how you can best assist me.

Do not admire me. A desire to live a full life does not warrant adoration.

Respect me, for respect presumes equity.

Do not tell, correct, and lead. Listen, support, and follow.

Do not work on me. Work with me.

Written by Norman Kunc

Dedicated to the memory of Tracy Latimer

This poem is written by Norman Kunc, a Disabled poet/storyteller. I interpret this poem as being about how people with disabilities have **personhood**- being an individual person who can make their own choices, be respected, and be seen as people being worthy of love and care.

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