

## Session 4

### Getting to know YOU

**WHOSE FUTURE GOAL 4:** You will identify unique learning needs related to your disability.



In the last session you learned about being unique and how important it is for you to know about your unique abilities and interests.

In the next few sessions you will think about the unique learning needs or supports related to your disability.

First, though, you are going to just think about what that word, “disability” means. Some of these things may feel a little *uncomfortable*, but stick with it. There is only one you and part of being “you” is knowing how you learn best.

**Whose Future Is It *Anyway*?** is written to assist students with unique learning needs to take more control in their educational planning.

If you have educational planning meetings, like transition IEP meetings, you are receiving some special services to assist you in learning more.

You know something. I hate the word “special”.

**Special** this and **Special** that.  
I mean, we’re not on Mr. Roger’s Neighborhood, are we?

So, from now on I’m not going to use the “s” word (*special*) (that’s the last time, I

promise). I’m going to call these services you get “MULES”.

MULES means:

My  
Unique  
Learning and  
Educational  
Supports

Those are the support services you get to help you learn. Support. That means you get what you need to do your best. Of course, you know what a mule is, right?

1: a hybrid offspring of a male donkey and female horse



2: a very stubborn person.

I have to tell you, I think that calling



these services **MULES** tells you something about what it is sometimes like to deal with a big system, like school districts. Most people who work in them, like teachers and principals, do a great job, work hard and will help you every chance they get. But in a lot of cases, there are so many rules and so much paperwork that you can’t get things done without having to push and pull a lot...like trying to move a stubborn mule!

So any way, since you are getting



**MULES**, you have qualified for



these **MULES** because of a disability that makes learning harder or makes it so that you need different ways of teaching to do your best.

That is nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about. The truth is, most of the students at your school would probably like to get some services that would help them.

I mean, look at it this way. The word “services” came from the original work of a servant. People who provide “services” are there to “serve” you. Like in a restaurant, when the person takes your order, serves your food, and is nice to you.

Now, don’t go wild on this. I mean, your teacher is not your servant.

But, your teacher does provide an important service to you. She or he provides a service called “teaching”.

Yeah, yeah, I know. You didn’t order that and would like to send it back.

Well, one way to make more money and have a high quality of life when you get to be an adult is to get a good education.

You are a smart young person. When someone is offering you a service that can get you more money, you’re going to take advantage of it, right? And it’s free!

Well, actually your parent probably pays for it out of taxes. But that’s another story.

Okay. When we talked about who should be at your education planning



meetings, we talked about some of the people who provide the services you use. I’ve already mentioned your teacher. And you learned about transition services before. (You remember.... services that help you learn the things you need to be independent and satisfied as an adult.)

**FUN FACT:** In 1975 the United States Congress found that the learning needs of students with disabilities were not being met. The congress passed a law to get students the support they needed. The most recent version of **IDEA** says that all students should be able to access a high quality curriculum designed to meet their unique needs, with supports as needed.

You also learned about some of the related services you can get, like speech or physical therapy and vocational education services. There are other related services you may not even think about, like school health services, recreation, counseling services and testing services. Even making sure you have the transportation you need to get back and forth from school is a service.

These are all decided at your yearly planning meeting. See why you need to be there?



Now, to get these **MULES** you have to qualify. Remember taking some tests and stuff? Those tests probably helped somebody identify your unique learning needs.

At that time, you may have learned from your folks or a teacher that you had a “disability.” Maybe you didn’t learn until you got moved to a different class or something.

Anyway, it’s important to look at how your disability might change how you learn.

Have you ever had a hard time learning? How about having a tough time reading in school or doing some math work? How did you feel about that?

**Frustrated?**

**Angry?**

**Embarrassed?**

Did it seem that no matter how hard you tried, things only got worse? Maybe you had a hard time telling someone else exactly what you were thinking or what you wanted to do.

A lot of young people who have been told they have a disability have said these things. Sometimes they say they don’t think they really have a disability. It’s hard for them to think about it, because they think it means they are not smart or that they are weird or different from their friends.

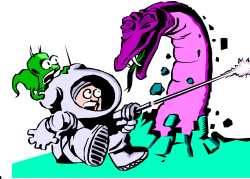
But, having a disability doesn’t mean those things at all. Maybe it’s a good idea for you to think more about what “disability” means. It means many

different things to different people. You need to know what it means to you.

Start by looking at what *OTHER PEOPLE* think about disability.

This next activity will let you look at some beliefs and stereotypes about people with disabilities.

A belief is what someone thinks. Like, some people believe in the Loch Ness



Monster.

Stereotypes are beliefs about groups of people. Stereotypes are more than just what *OTHER PEOPLE* think about people who are in a group, they are what *OTHER PEOPLE* expect from those people.

There are lots of stereotypes about people and groups. I would bet that you even have some stereotypes of your own.

No? Answer this question:

?

A boy went to the dentist to get a cavity filled. The boy was the dentist’s son, but the dentist was not the boy’s father.



How was this possible?

Think about it for a minute.

Got it? Good. If not, keep thinking. You might have figured it out after you thought about it, but I bet your beliefs about dentists made it hard for you to come up with the answer *quickly*.

Of course, the answer is that the dentist



is the boy's mother!

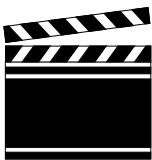
One stereotype about dentists is that they are men.

That tells you something about stereotypes about women, too. There are a lot of jobs that women do very well that *OTHER PEOPLE* often think of only as having men do them. Jobs like surgeon, pilot, athlete, or coach.

In this case, you can see how a stereotype would not be a good thing. If *oTHER PEOPLE* believe that dentists are men, they won't encourage a young woman to become a dentist, will they?

There are lots of stereotypes out there.

Most stereotypes are unfair to people. Like all blondes are dumb. There are a lot of very smart blonde women and men.



Why don't you come up with five stereotypes? If you need some support, find a friend or ask someone else in the room.

### 5 STEREOTYPES I KNOW

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Take a look at these. What do you think?

The truth is that stereotypes about people usually limit them. They take away from the fact that we are all unique people, with individual interests and abilities.

There are stereotypes about people with disabilities. Even people with disabilities may have stereotypes about people with other kinds of disabilities.

The following activity will let you think about some of your beliefs and stereotypes. You can write your answers in the space below the question or just think about your answers. It's up to you.

1. What is a disability?



2. What does the word "disability" mean to you?



3. What does a person with a disability look like?



4. What happens to people when they have a disability?



5. What is your first thought when you see a person with a white cane?



6. What is your first thought when you see someone with a hearing aid?



7. What is your first thought when you are told a person has mental retardation?



8. What do you first think when a person has a learning disability?



9. What is your first thought when you see a person using a wheelchair?



10. What kind of rights do people with disabilities have?



11. Where should people with disabilities live?



12. Should people with disabilities work?



13. Should a person with a disability get married?



14. Should people with disabilities have children?



Look at your answers. These are your beliefs and opinions. Your opinions

might have been formed by your own experiences or maybe by knowing someone with a disability. Or by watching a movie or TV. Or by hearing someone else talk about a person with a disability.

Let's look at these same questions, but based on facts. These may be just like your answers. But they may be very different. It is true that everyone has the right to their own opinions, but most people want their opinions or beliefs to be based on what is true.

### 1. What is a Disability?

In the Americans with Disabilities Act (called ADA) a person with a disability is someone who has a physical or mental impairment. Impairment means a limit. The ADA says that a person with a disability is someone who has a hard time caring for one or more of his/her needs alone (seeing, speaking, working, breathing, learning, walking, or hearing). It is important to know that a disability is not a person! A disability is only one



part of a person. People like to be known by who they are and not what they have. People with disabilities want to be seen as people first. Most people with disabilities do not like to be called by the label for their disability. When meeting someone with a disability it is best to call them by their name. When talking about a person with a disability it is best to say their name and not their disability. People without disabilities like to be called by their name also.

### 2. What does the word "disability" mean to you?

People use different words to talk about people with disabilities. Many of them are unfair, and create negative stereotypes. Like “retarded” or “gimp”.

Many people talk about people with disabilities as “handicapped”. Like the



parking space. But saying that a disability is a handicap means that you can't do things because of the disability.

Many people with disabilities don't like the word “handicap” because people think of “handicapped” people as needing help. The word came from the phrase “hand in cap” meaning a person

who was begging.



Another word that is sometimes used to talk about people with disabilities is “challenged”. While it is probably true that a person with a disability has challenges each day, many people with disabilities don't like to be called challenged. They say it means that they are the ones who have to change. There are many cases where the world can change just as easily.

For example, a person using an electric wheelchair cannot get over a curb. The chair is too big and heavy. You could say that the person is “physically challenged” but really the challenge is the curb. You can add a curb cut or a ramp, and the challenge is gone.

The word “disability” may feel uncomfortable to you. You may still think of it as negative. You need to be comfortable with yourself. All people have some type of limitation. Having a

disability means the limitation in some areas is more than for most people. People with disabilities should be treated as other people without a disability.

### 3. What does a person with a disability look like?

Most people with a disability look like people without disabilities. Sometimes a person may not have an arm or leg or they may use some support like a wheelchair, walker, or hearing aid. These supports, called adaptive devices, are sometimes a clue that a person has a disability. Actually these adaptive devices make it so that the person can do activities that their disability makes more difficult. So, a person with a disability may use a wheelchair to get around in the world. A person who doesn't hear everything may use a hearing aid to make the sounds louder so they can hear them.

Some people with disabilities may not need adaptive devices so their disabilities are not seen. Disabilities that are not seen are sometimes called "hidden" disabilities. Some learning disabilities are like that. You can't see the disability.

Did you know that Tom Cruise has a learning disability? He doesn't "look" like a person with a disability, does he?

The final answer is a person with a disability looks like herself or himself. Not like anyone else. Unique. All



people are unique. Even identical twins have things that make them unique.

### 4. What happens to people when they have a disability?

Seem like a dumb question? Well, one stereotype of people with disabilities is that they shouldn't be in public with everyone else.

Because of stereotypes, some people with disabilities have not been given the same chances as other people. They don't get a chance to go to school with their neighborhood friends. In some cases, they have to live in a different place.

The truth is people with disabilities can do the same things everyone else can, if given the chance and support. Some people with disabilities will make it in the world fine, others won't. Some people without disabilities make it in the world fine and others don't. Not much difference.

People with disabilities have to get the chance to choose where they want to live, work, learn and play and the support to do this.

### 5. What is your first thought when you see someone with a white cane?

People with visual impairments (limitations in being able to see) or blindness may use a white cane to move about on their own. The white cane helps a person to be independent. The white cane is a support for the person who cannot see.

### 6. What is your first thought when you see someone with a hearing aid?

A hearing aid helps some people with hearing loss or deafness to hear sounds. It depends on the type and degree of hearing loss. Some people with hearing loss or deafness do not use hearing aids.



7. What is your first thought when you are told that a person has an intellectual disability or mental retardation?

People with intellectual disabilities just need more time or support to learn things. The words mental retardation have been used in negative ways so some people do not like the words. People with mental retardation or intellectual disabilities are people first and can live in their own homes, drive cars, work at real jobs and have their own families.

8. What do you think when a person has a learning disability?

People with learning disabilities need more time or support to learn certain things, like reading or doing some types of math work. Some very smart people in history had learning disabilities. People with learning disabilities may use supports like having a test read to them, not having time limits set on taking a test, or using a cassette recording of a lesson to learn better. People with learning disabilities are just like other people only they may learn things in a different way.

9. What is your first thought when you see someone using a wheelchair?

People usually use a wheelchair because they have a hard time walking or just are



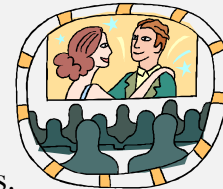
not able to walk. A wheelchair gives people with physical disabilities the chance to move around their world. People sometimes think of wheelchairs as big, slow, clunky things to sit in and wait for someone to push around.

Not true! Now wheelchairs come in many sizes, shapes, colors and styles. If

you have ever seen a wheelchair basketball game you know that they are anything but slow. People who use wheelchairs have done basically anything they wanted to do, from climbing mountains and skiing to becoming a



judge



or acting in movies.

10. What kind of rights do people with disabilities have?

The same rights as all Americans. People with disabilities do not give up their rights just because they have a disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) talks about those rights and gives people with disabilities protection from discrimination. Discrimination means that people treat you unfairly. The ADA says that people with disabilities must have a chance to do the same things that people without disabilities have - to get a good education, find and keep a job, and do things they want to do.

Discrimination occurs when OTHER PEOPLE let their stereotypes and beliefs judge what a person can do, instead of letting that person show them.

11. Where should people with disabilities live?

Anywhere they want to!! Having a disability does not mean that a person has to live in a certain kind of place. People with disabilities are gaining more



opportunities to live in places like people without disabilities.

Having a disability may mean that a person uses assistance or support to live where they want. This may mean that a person uses supports to write checks for bills. Or may use a personal care attendant to help with many life activities. The type of support a person uses will be different for each person.

12. Should people with disabilities be able to work?

Yes!!! People with disabilities should also be able to work where they want. Having a disability does not mean that a person can only do one kind of work. People with disabilities work in all types of jobs.

Too many people with disabilities have to work in low-paying, dead-end jobs or are not working at all because of discrimination and a lack of support. The ADA requires that employers provide some supports.

But, people with disabilities have to know what supports would let them do the same job as other workers. This is one more reason it is important to think about the ways having a disability changes how you learn and work.

13. Should a person with a disability get



married?

Only if they want to! Getting married is something that a lot of adults do. There are some adults who choose to stay single. This choice should be up to each person.

14. Should people with disabilities have



children?

If they want to! Having children is something that a lot of adults do. There are some adults who choose not to have children. This choice should be up to the person.

Stereotypes can really limit people more than a disability does. Some day maybe you won't have to think about questions like these because people will learn that having a disability is not a dead-end street.


They will learn to judge people on what they can do, not what *OTHER PEOPLE* think they can or cannot do.

Until then, we still have to work hard to overcome these stereotypes.

Now, let's get back to those MULES



we were talking about. How

did you qualify to get MULES  ?

Did anyone ever tell you why you have



MULES ? Has anyone talked to you about having a disability? Now that we have talked about how having a disability is just another part of life, it is probably a good time for you to take a look at that part of yourself.



What about talking with your parent, a teacher, or your school counselor or school psychologist? They may be as uncomfortable about this as you are! Tell them you want to know more about the best way for you to learn.

Here are some questions you could ask:

What is the disability I receive support for?

How was it decided that I have a disability?

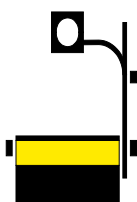
What does having that disability mean for my learning?

If you are still too uncomfortable with this, just think about the questions yourself.

Remember a couple of things:

***You are not a disability. You are a person with abilities and interests.***

***Having a disability just means that you need to find the supports that let you learn your best.***



Okay. Let's look at what you've covered this session.

- ☒ You learned that you receive unique learning and educational s\_\_\_\_\_.
- ☒ You learned that the purpose of these supports is to let you l\_\_\_\_\_ better.
- ☒ You looked again at the types of services the law lets you have:
  - individual t\_\_\_\_\_ and planning


- t\_\_\_\_\_ services
- t\_\_\_\_\_
- related services like speech, hearing and physical education

☒ You thought about how the word "d\_\_\_\_\_" makes you feel.

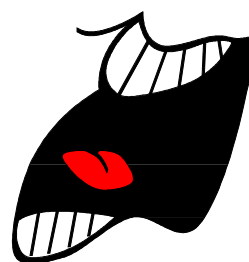
☒ You looked at s\_\_\_\_\_ you have about people and stereotypes *other people* have about people with disabilities.



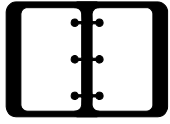
Before the next session, you should have:

-  Finished thinking about your disability. You could talk with someone else about how you learn best. You could also just think about these things on your own.

Okay. So that's it for now.



Later.



## Session 4 Summary Sheet

**WHOSE FUTURE GOAL 4:** You will identify unique learning needs related to your disability.

- ☒ You learned that you receive unique learning and educational supports.
- ☒ You learned that the purpose of these supports is to let you learn better.
- ☒ You looked again at the types of services the law lets you have:
  - individual teaching and planning
  - transition services
  - transportation
  - related services like speech, hearing and physical education
- ☒ You thought about how the word “disability” makes you feel.
- ☒ You looked at stereotypes you have about people and stereotypes other people have about people with disabilities.

