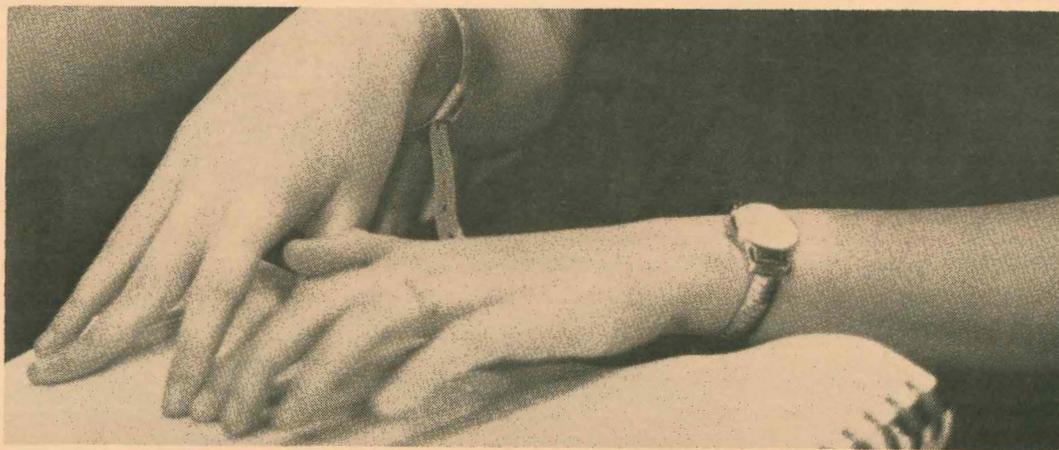


DISABILITIES

and the
Lutheran World
Federation

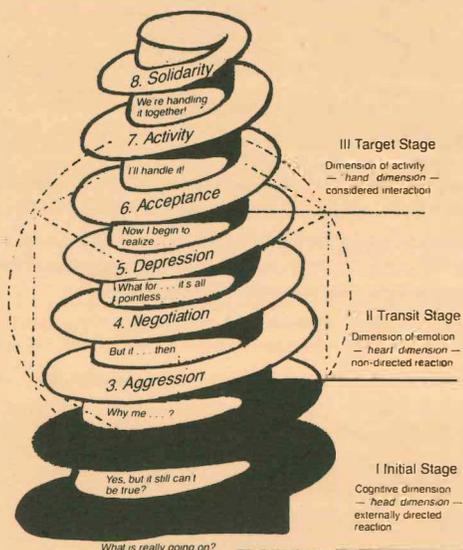


“Disabilities” is a term which is used to refer collectively to a number of temporary or permanent conditions that interfere with a person’s ability to do something independently — walk, see, hear, or learn.¹

In this resource the term “disability” will be used to refer to “conditions which cause a person to experience difficulty in functioning physically, communicatively, intellectually, or emotionally in everyday life.”

in reaching out for assistance and learning to use available community resources. Assistance for families is especially needed to move through what Dr. Erika Schuchardt⁷ describes as the eight phases of crisis management experienced by persons and families in life circumstances involving significant loss. The phases of the learning process are as follows:

Crisis Management as a Learning Process in Eight Spiral Phases*



Schuchardt, Erika: Why is This Happening to Me . . . ? Guidance and Hope for Those Who Suffer With Bibliographies of over 500 Lifestories Augsburg Fortress Publishers, Minneapolis 1990 1st German Edition 1981, 5th German Ed. 1989 Translated in several languages Was awarded the German Literature Prize 1984

Erika Schuchardt

Uncertainty - an awareness that something may be wrong but not exactly sure what is wrong. This period is plagued with feeling of doubt, hesitation, and frustration due to lack of knowledge.

Certainty - an initial awareness of the fact that there is a loss often accompanied with disbelief, guilt, and denial.

Aggression - a period where anger is experienced and is expressed through acts of hostility or offense toward another person.

Negotiation - an effort to deal with the loss by pursuing the cause or a solution. Often during this period there is a search for a "miraculous cure."

Depression - a grieving period in which an awareness of the extent and complication of the loss are experienced. The griever feels resentment, cynicism,

and anger over what was lost and anticipated future loss.

Acceptance - the griever acknowledges the loss and moves towards a resolution.

Activity - a period where energy and power are put into motion for self-help and reformation.

Solidarity - a healing period where the person who experienced the loss looks beyond self to the well-being of others in the community.

For those who minister to and with disabled persons and their families the significance of the impact of feelings experienced during these phases of learning process needs to be recognized and honored.

In order to overcome the sense of isolation which disabled persons and their families may experience, the church family must work at developing relationships.⁸ Christians are called to live responsibly and joyfully in relationships. The will of God is for all humankind to be interrelated. Life is formed and reformed around interrelationships and God's covenant with humans. The whole universe is interrelated. Humankind is interrelated with the earth, the plants and the animals and they with one another. God's covenant shapes humankind's life together.⁹ Attitudes towards persons with disabilities can be a real barrier in building relationships between those who are not disabled and persons who are disabled. Often fear of the disability stands in the way of genuine love, acceptance and affirmation of a disabled person.¹⁰ Uncertainty of how to relate to a person with a disability is often experienced by abled-bodied people because they are not sure if the disabled person will respond in a physical or verbal embracing manner, or fail to respond at all. The fear of rejection and discomfort in relating to a person with a disability can result in an impatience on the part of able-bodied persons which causes them either to pity or avoid contact with disabled persons.

People who are not disabled need to overcome their fears. Persons with disabilities need not be feared, the person is not the disability, but rather a person who has a disability.¹¹

The following suggestions may be helpful in overcoming fears of interacting with and relating to persons with a disability:

- Do not automatically hold onto a person's wheelchair. It is part of the person's body space. Hanging or leaning on the chair is similar to hanging or leaning on a person sitting in any chair.

It is often fine if you are friends, but inappropriate if you are strangers.

- Offer assistance if you wish, but do not insist. If a person needs help she/he will accept your offer and tell you exactly what will be helpful. If you force assistance, it can sometimes be unsafe (e.g. if you grab the chair, the person using it could lose his/her balance).
- Talk directly to the person using the wheelchair, not to a third party. The person is not helpless or unable to talk.
- Do not be sensitive about using words like "walking" or "running." People using wheelchairs use the same words.
- Be alert to the existence of architectural barriers when selecting a restaurant, home, theatre, or other facility you want to visit with a wheelchair user.
- If conversation proceeds more than a few minutes, and it is possible to do so, consider sitting down in order to share eye level. It is uncomfortable for a seated person to look straight up for a long period.
- Do not park your car in a parking place which is reserved for use by disabled people. These spaces are reserved out of necessity, not convenience. The space is wider than usual in order to get wheelchairs in and out of the car and is close to the entrance for those who cannot push far.

When you meet a blind person . . .

- If a blind person seems to need help, go ahead and offer your assistance. But do not help unless the individual says you can. Always ask before you act. If you are not sure exactly what to do, ask the person to explain how you should help.
- To guide a blind person, let the individual take your arm. Do not grab the blind person's arm. This is dangerous as well as insulting and frightening. The blind person will walk about half a step behind you, following your body motion. If you encounter steps, curbs, or other obstacles, identify them. In places too narrow for you to walk two abreast, bring your arm back and let the guided person follow you.
- When talking to a blind person, use a normal tone and speed of voice. Shouting or speaking to an adult as a child is very insulting. Blindness does not affect hearing or intelligence. Speak

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