



Module 1: Introduction

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Learning Objectives:

1. Describe the social model of disability and how it differs from the biomedical model
2. Understand the impact of attitudinal barriers to community engagement
3. Identify the 3 diagnoses that are considered “serious mental illnesses”

Welcome!

We are thrilled that you have chosen to complete this series of trainings on creating welcoming parks and recreation environments! Whether you are a parks professional, a volunteer, or happened upon this document out of sheer curiosity, you have made an important step to deepen your understanding of the benefits of parks for people with mental health conditions in order to foster inclusive and welcoming parks in your community! In this module, we provide an overview of disability as well as brief descriptions of each lesson in this series. Finally, you will find valuable resources at the end of this module including a glossary of terms that you will become familiar with, and a list of national resources for staff and volunteers. Keep these materials on hand as you go through each lesson!

Disability: Changing Perspectives

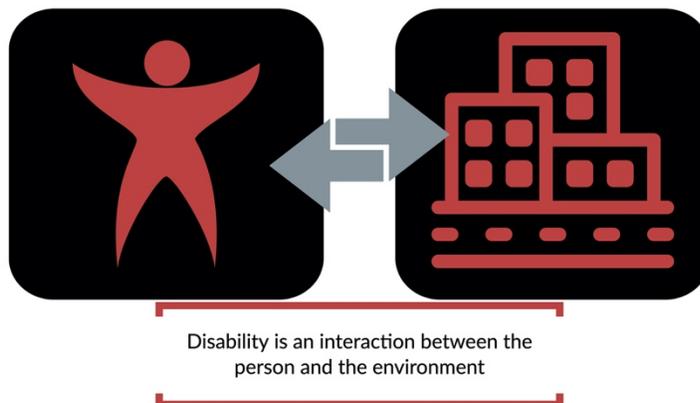
Let’s start by discussing what disability is. There are various ways to view and understand disability. We apply the social model of disability¹ to these training materials. When applying this lens, we view disability as an interaction between the person and the environment. This differs from the more traditional biomedical model, which views disability as a problem or impairment within the person. You may be accustomed to environments that are inaccessible to individuals with physical disabilities—for example, a person who uses a wheelchair for mobility might be meeting up with friends at a restaurant but finds that the entrance has stairs and lacks a ramp. In this situation, the person experiences disability because of an unaccommodating and unwelcoming environment.

¹ Oliver, M. (2013) The social model of disability: Thirty years on, *Disability & Society*, 28(7), 1024-1026, DOI: [10.1080/09687599.2013.818773](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2013.818773)

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People with mental health conditions also experience disability when faced with unwelcoming environments. There are so many aspects of the environment to consider—sensory, physical—even people’s attitudes and assumptions. People with mental health conditions may experience disability when faced with discriminatory attitudes toward people with mental illnesses. For example, let’s say a woman named Rebecca applies for a job at a law firm, and somehow the hiring manager learns that she has been diagnosed with schizophrenia. Rebecca is a great fit for the job and gets through the interview process with flying colors! But the hiring manager decides not to hire her because of beliefs they hold about schizophrenia. In this scenario, Rebecca is faced with a disabling environment—specifically, attitudinal barriers which prevent her from meaningful work that she is qualified to do. Remember the social model of disability as you complete each lesson—understanding this model is an important first piece of this training!

SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY



Overview of Lessons

Now that we’ve reviewed the social model of disability, let’s take a brief look at what you can expect from each module in this series. Each reading is organized in a consistent format so that you can plan and deliver effective and cohesive staff trainings. Lessons always start with identification of learning objectives, background information on the topic, and a section on why the specific topic is important. Be sure to give attention to the “**Lived Experience Spotlight**” in each reading! We believe that it’s vital to include the voices of people who live with mental health conditions—their own lived experiences—in these training materials. Reflect on how the quotations from our research participants tie in with the information covered in the lesson.

In Module 2, we focus on **disability as an aspect of diversity**, and provide crucial background information on the disability rights movement. Module 3 looks at the **benefits of parks for people diagnosed with serious mental illnesses** and provides practical strategies that you can implement in your parks to ensure that these benefits are maximized for all park users. Module 4 shifts focus to **avoiding discriminatory language** to support you to develop welcoming and inclusive parks. Module 5 provides information on the principles of Universal Design in **creating welcoming parks**, followed by the sixth module, which provides practical strategies for **including diverse stakeholders**, such as mental health consumers and providers, in the park planning process. Finally, module 7 provides several practical strategies to **connect mental health consumers to parks**.

A Note on Language

You may have already noticed that the terms “serious mental illness” and “mental health conditions” have been used in this reading. “Serious mental illnesses” typically refer to three specific diagnoses—major depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia spectrum disorders. For these trainings, you will typically find the term “mental health conditions” used, as

this phrasing is more frequently embraced by individuals who experience mental health challenges and is inclusive of conditions such as anxiety disorders and personality disorders. That said, it should be noted that the information in these materials is beneficial to everyone in the community—not just people with mental health conditions.

National Resources for Staff and Volunteers

When you are looking to learn about mental health and ways to promote mental health inclusion in your community, it can be difficult to know where to start. There are tons of resources out there for individuals hoping to educate themselves on mental health: use these as a starting point and continue exploring other materials!

- **Mental Health First Aid** is a mental health literacy course that teaches participants to identify and respond to symptoms of substance abuse or mental health problems in people that they may encounter. It is not geared specifically toward mental health professionals or health care professionals - anyone can take this course! Courses can be general, or geared towards assisting youths, older adults, or people in rural areas, among other options. www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org
- **The Suicide Prevention Lifeline** is a national network of local crisis centers that provides free, 24/7, confidential call service that will connect you with resources and assistance. The website also provides information about the risk factors and warning signs of suicidal behavior, as well as opportunities for volunteers to get involved. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/
- **The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** is a component of the U.S. Department Health and Human Services. The SAMSHA National Helpline is a 24/7, free service that provides information and referrals about treatment options for people experiencing substance abuse problems. www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline
- **The National Alliance on Mental Illness** offers in-person and online education programs and resources geared towards people who interact with youth who may have mental health problems. They also sponsor activities and events to raise public awareness of mental illness. www.nami.org
- **MindWise** offers online screenings for mental health problems for yourself or others, and you can even purchase a kiosk to place in your space that people can utilize for screenings. They also provide specialized training geared towards decreasing mental health and substance abuse problems in the workplace. www.mindwise.org/
- **Mental Health Resources** provides services geared towards people experiencing substance use disorders as well as mental health problems. They focus on adults with long-term mental health problems, who may not be able to live independently. MHR is passionate about helping people with mental illnesses overcome barriers in their community and access the resources they deserve. www.mhresources.org/

Glossary of Terms

The social model of disability: The social model views disability as an interaction between the person and the environment rather than a problem or impairment within the person.

Lived experience: Refers to individuals who have experienced a mental health conditions and may or may not use mental health services.

Mental health consumer: A person receiving mental health services.

Serious mental illnesses: Refers to three specific mental health diagnoses; major depressive disorder, bipolar disorders, and schizophrenia spectrum disorders.

Mental health conditions: Refers to any mental health conditions, including anxiety disorders, personality disorders, and serious mental illnesses.

Peer-delivered services: Services provided by individuals with lived experience.

Certified peer support specialist: A mental health professional who draws upon their lived experience to provide services to consumers.