

## B Dealing with possible stigma and embarrassment

A Summary of Information and Ideas from “Facing the Crowd” by Deborah Fullwood and Peter Cronin<sup>1</sup>

For parents, siblings and others associated with a person with a physical disability, there is the need to deal with the reactions of others. It may be worth looking at, and thinking about, the following questions.

### 1. Why do I feel so uncomfortable when I am with other people?

Possible reasons include;

- A. I feel obvious and exposed;
- B. I feel different and isolated;
- C. I feel pressure from other people;
- D. I feel pressure from myself;
- E. I feel devalued and a failure;
- F. I feel unsure;
- G. I feel irritated and overloaded;

### 2. Why do other people sometimes seem so insensitive when they are with me?

Reasons for this could be;

- A. They feel unfamiliar;
- B. They feel uncertain;
- C. They feel uncomfortable;
- D. They feel afraid;
- E. They feel confused;
- F. They feel disinterested;

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<sup>1</sup> Summarised and adapted from Fullwood, D., & Cronin, P., (1986) Facing The Crowd: Managing other people's insensitivities to your disabled child. Melbourne, Victoria: Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind.

### 3. From which groups of people do insensitivities come?

They could probably be categorised as;

- A. People you genuinely care about (e.g. close relatives, and friends);
- B. People you need on side (e.g. medical and other health care providers);
- C. People you are stuck with (e.g. teachers, neighbours, regular transport operator);
- D. Strangers and people you don't care about (e.g. people in the street);
- E. Other children.  
(The category can help you decide how you respond to them.)

### 4. Do I feel more uncomfortable in some settings than others?

This can involve thinking about;

- A. Who said or did it? (As listed in the previous section.);
- B. Where was it said or done? (In a public or private setting?);
- C. When it was said or done? (Was it a particularly stressful time, or event, e.g. in a hospital setting, or a family event like a birthday party?);
- D. What was said or done? (Did they, or should they realise that what they did would make you uncomfortable?);
- E. How it was said or done? (Body language, and the "tone" of the interaction, is the issues here. Like that saying about, "It's not what you say it; it is *how* you say it that counts.")

Some possible ways to respond to these situations;

### Can I really do anything about other people when they appear insensitive?

Although it doesn't make it any easier, having looked at those issues and questions, it can be a case of doing things like;

- A. Accepting the situation, or recognising that all things considered, there is nothing that can be done about this *particular* situation, in other words "Grin and bear it";
- B. Recognise, that as you get more used to this particular "trigger", it will become less of an issue;

- C. Avoiding the situation, that causes “trouble”, (admittedly, not always possible,)
- D. Politely, but firmly indicate that the action was insensitive or inappropriate, *and* suggest alternative ways to behave, to reduce the chances of it happening again, either to yourself, or others;
  
- E. Tell them how you feel, (again politely, but firmly, if at all possible, because a “theatrical performance” may be interpreted as that);
  
- F. Practice these ways of responding in less intimidating settings, so that you can gradually work up to the “bigger” settings.