

***Your Best Self:
New Ways of Thinking
About Disability and
Support***



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What is a Disability?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

- A physical, mental, cognitive or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits a person's ability to engage in certain tasks or actions or participate in typical daily activities and interactions

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

- A person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity

Social Security Administration

- A person who is unable to engage in any substantial gainful activity because of a medically determinable physical or mental impairment(s) that is either expected to result in death or has lasted or is expected to last for at least one year.

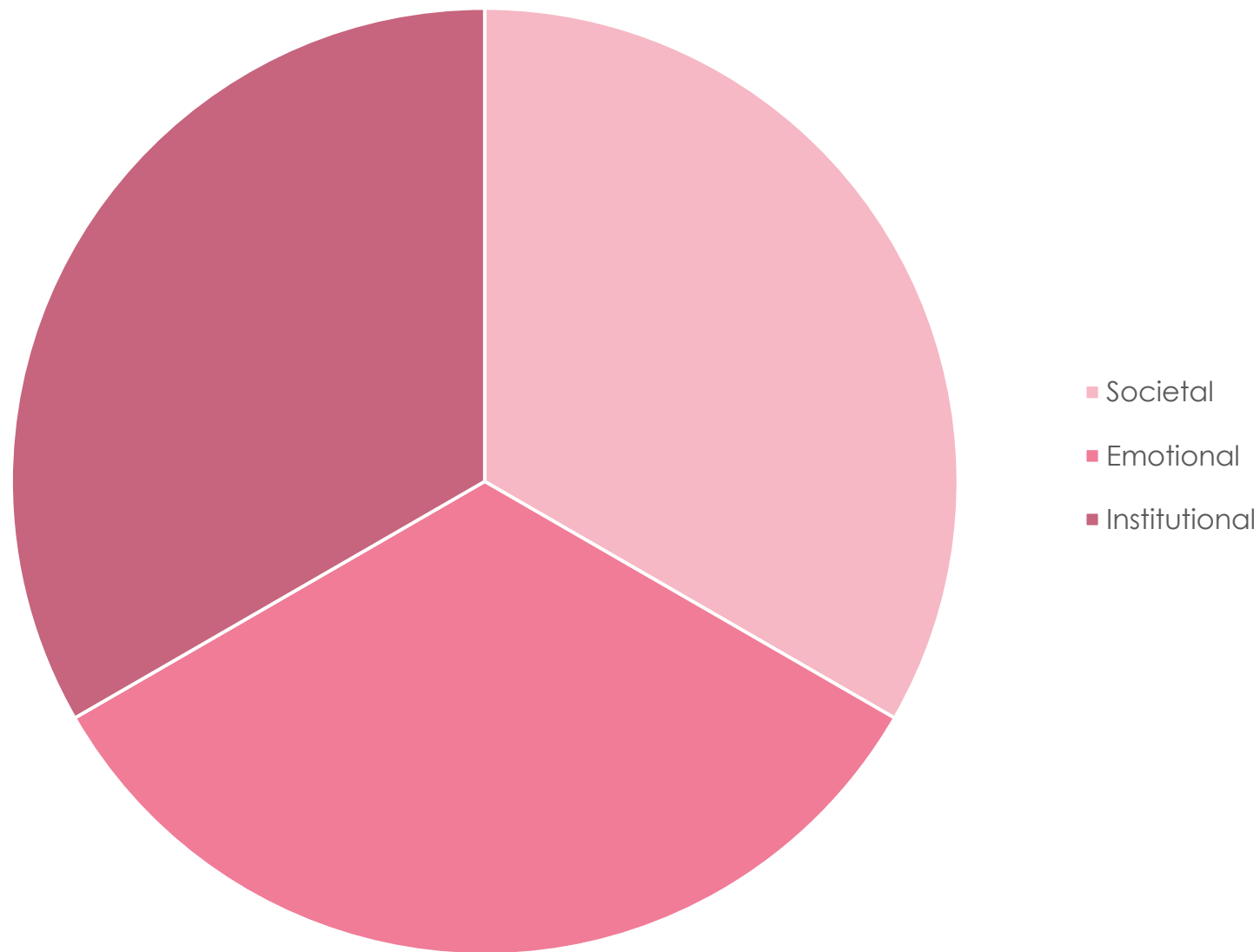
Stigma

A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality or person.

Why does it exist?

Primarily due to societal, emotional and institutional influences

The Stigma of Disability



Emotional Aspects of Disability

Label

Dependence

Grief

Reset

Denial

Acceptance

Depression

Hiding

The Problem with the Stigma

- Prevents us from seeking treatment
- Prevents us from asking for help
- Prevents us from collecting and retaining documents which prove that we are having difficulties
- Prevents us from requesting accommodations at school or in the workplace
- Encourages us to resign from jobs or withdraw from school without first exploring other accommodations
- Prevents people from filing for benefits such as short-term disability, long-term disability and Social Security disability

Debunking the Stigma

- Having a disability does not necessarily mean that you are unable to work.
- According to the SSA, the fraud incidence rate for disability claims is less than 1%.
- In an SSA study of applicants who had been denied benefits by a judge, almost 25% remained out of work four years later.
- Your disability application is private, and all matters pertaining to your disability claim are accessible only to SSA.
- The words “disability” and “disabled” do not define you. Rather, YOU decide what the words mean to you.

Things That We Protect



A New Way of Thinking about Disability

- Become your best advocate
 - Pursue treatment options until you find what works best for you
 - Learn about disability programs & protect your greatest asset
 - Keep records (absences, grades, evaluations, disciplinary records)
- Ask for what you need to become your best self
 - Educational/employment accommodations
 - Apply for the benefits that you need
- Do what is best for you
 - Reset your expectations
 - Find your purpose
- Know that you are not alone
 - Seek advice from others with similar experiences
 - Join or form a support group
 - Help someone else

“But at some point I got tired of crying and I embraced this part of me. I joined the disability community on Twitter and started talking to more people with my sleep disorder. Sharing my experiences led me to find communities that I felt I belonged to”

- Lauryn Craine

“The goal is not to avoid falling or needing help. The goal is to be seen, asked, heard, believed, valued as we are, allowed to exist in these exact bodies, invited to the party, and encouraged to dance however we want to”

**- Rebekah Taussig,
Sitting Pretty: The View from
My Ordinary Resilient
Disabled Body**