

You and I (child version)

From the www.disabilityisnatural.com E-Newsletter by Kathie Snow

Other “You and I” comparisons are out there; this is another that can hopefully generate positive change. Not all scenarios apply to all children, but they represent the real lives of too many children with developmental disabilities.

You go to preschool-child care or stay at home with your mom or dad.

*I go to the special ed preschool, where I get therapy, work on goals they wrote for me, and more.
I have long bus rides. It's hard when you're just a little kid.*

**You graduate from preschool. I'm held back in the special ed preschool;
they say I'm not ready to move on. (How do you fail preschool?)**

**You start kindergarten, whether or not you know your letters and numbers or anything else.
I'm told I'm still not ready for kindergarten, so I'm “placed” in a special education classroom.**

**You move up as you grow up; you know the difference between first grade and fourth grade.
I stay in the same special ed classroom for years, so I don't know what grade I'm in,
and I don't know how to be a first-grader or a fourth-grader.**

You're frustrated, sad, scared, or angry. I'm told I have inappropriate behavior.

You get invited to friends' birthday parties and they come to yours. I don't get invited to birthday parties; I don't really have any friends. My family and some professionals are at my birthday party.

**You have to do chores, be responsible, make some of your own decisions, and more.
I want to do these things, but no one will let me try; no one expects me to do what other kids do.**

**You play sports and do other fun activities to exercise your body and develop your skills.
I'm taken to therapy; they say I'm “special” and can't do things that “normal” kids do.**

You speak up and defend yourself. I'm described as noncompliant.

**You work part-time in high school, and you date and have fun with friends.
I'm still in a special ed classroom, getting therapy, etc. Sometimes I bag groceries as part of my IEP, but they don't pay me. I have no friends. Will I ever be kissed? And I still don't know what grade I'm in.**

You have big plans for your life: a job, college, your own place, and more. Your parents have big hopes and dreams for you. I'm going into a transition program for life-skills; then a residential placement; and goals—more goals. My parents are hoping they can get all the services they think I need.

**You'll live a life of responsibility, inclusion, and freedom.
I'll most likely be held in a state of helplessness, isolation, and dependency.**

You're surrounded by family and friends. I'm surrounded by people who are paid to be in my life.

You're known by your abilities and interests. I'm known by my diagnoses and problems.

You're included because you're alive. I'm supposed to earn the right to be included.

You're presumed to be competent. I'm presumed to be incompetent.