

IS EQUALITY ENOUGH

Have you ever thought about the difference between the words equality and equity?

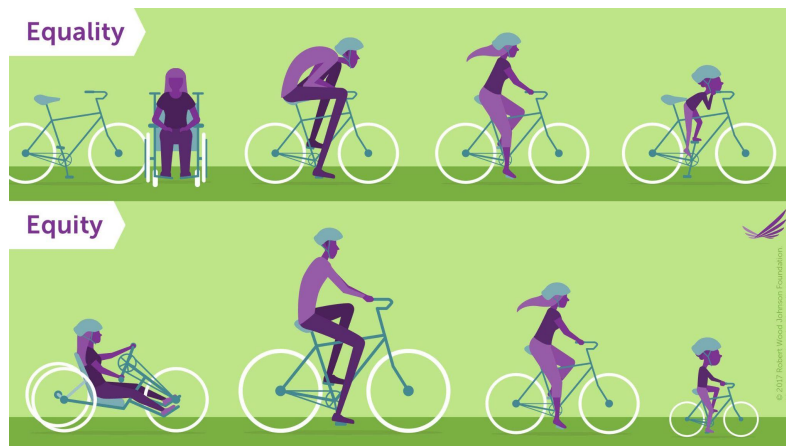


Photo: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

At first look equality, and equity, may seem like they mean the same thing - until you dig a bit deeper. And, when you dig deeper an important distinction is revealed that's relevant to our work around providing sexuality education that is inclusive and cognitively accessible for people with I/DD.

Stick with me. The word equality means everyone gets the same thing, but unfortunately, equality doesn't always work for everyone. In the top image, everyone is given the same bicycle. We'll call this the "equality bike." When a person who uses a wheelchair receives what is equal, they can't use it and they just sit next to the equality bicycle. Furthermore, the tall person is too big and the little person is too small and can barely touch the pedals. The equality bike only works for one of the people.

On the other hand, the word equity takes into consideration that people need different things in order to have the same opportunity or experience. Look at the bottom image, with equity the individuals are transporting themselves on different kinds of cycles. The person who uses a wheelchair needs a handcycle and the tall person and little kid need a bike that matches their height. They receive what they need in order to transport themselves and now have equal opportunities.

Most of us have a positive relationship with the concept of equality - that's a good thing and should make us feel happy to know everyone is being treated equally, but honestly, being treated equally doesn't go far enough. What we should be striving for is equity.

So, how does this connect to our work to provide sexuality education that's both inclusive and cognitively accessible for people with I/DD? Receiving the same, standard sexuality education curriculum that everyone receives, may work for some but not everyone and is just like the "equality bike." People with I/DD need *equitable* sexuality education that meets their specific learning needs and is delivered in a cognitively accessible way in order for them to learn about sexuality and relationships just like everyone else. Bottom line, equitable sexuality education leads to equal knowledge.

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