

Bridging Social Roles | eLearning (Transcript)

Good day everyone! My name is Leanne Fenez from Abilities Manitoba. In today's e-learning video, I wanted to explore the concept of social roles... what are they and why are they so important?

Social roles or more importantly, valued social roles are the key to the good things in life for everyone! When we contribute in active and meaningful ways where we live, work and play we have more opportunities to meet people, to develop new skills and project a positive image to others.

So what are we talking about when we say valued social role? Let's dig into that a bit...

We are talking about things people do that contribute positively and involve others... these activities and responsibilities add value and build connection with other people. They are both valued and social in nature. So think about where people are counted on or have impact? Where do they belong?

Let's use some examples to look at the difference between a simple role or label with a valued social role:

- A common role people talk about often is one of an employee or a worker. You have a role as an employee if you get paid to do work however that role becomes a valued social role when you are the employee who everyone goes to when they have a problem, or the one that cleans the kitchen after lunch hour or perhaps you are the person that the boss counts on to do special projects.
- You may have a role as an aunt simply because your sibling have kids or a valued social role if you are the cool aunt that your nephew can tell anything to!
- Are you a church goer or do you help with the coat check or take collection or assist the with the service? The first is merely a role while the second, those are valued social roles that plants the seeds of opportunity and connection.
- You can be a neighbour simply because you live beside someone or you could have an active and positive social role because you look after your neighbour's house when they are away, or lend them your lawn care equipment or watch out for their kids when they are waiting for the school bus?

- You can paint pictures as a hobby or you can be an artist... an artist who attends classes, goes to art shows, or sells their art alongside other painters and crafters.

Social roles must be positive, active and current. – watching football does not make you a football player, planting flowers in a pot does not make you a gardener, volunteering two years ago at the Humane Society isn't a valued social role today!

Do you see the difference? Good... now why is it so important that

Positive social roles enhance our image, increase our skills and can bring meaning and purpose to our life. When you meet a new person, what's typically the first thing you ask about them after their name.... you ask questions about their valued social roles... sure maybe not in those exact words but we ask about what they do, we ask about their family connections, and so on. The answers give you insight as to who the person is and where they fit in with you and others.

The answers are the seeds of connection and relationships... we are drawn to people who we have things in common with. These shared experiences and roles give us things to talk about and activities to share.

Having a variety of positive social roles that are valued in society, increases our status and reputation. Conversely, holding roles that are different or looked down upon by society decreases our value and sets us apart from others.

Historically, people with disabilities have faced discrimination and negative attitudes from others... positive social roles are critical to help correct this imbalance. Valued social roles fight common negative stereotypes and provide greater access to the good things in life... relationships, employment, inclusion, belonging.

So now that you know what they are and why they are so critically important, what can you do to help plant the seeds for social roles??

Well as in all good support, we start with and are led by the person. What do you know about the person's interests, gifts, and talents? What is meaningful to the person and fills them with purpose?

With this knowledge as your guide ask yourself, where do people spend time? Are they passive observers? Are there opportunities for them to get more involved and contribute?

What gifts, talents and interests are currently not being used? Could these turn into social roles? A few years ago, I met a woman who had a gift of making people feel welcomed and comfortable. She used a wheelchair and needed help to do many things however, the support team surrounding her honed in on this talent of hers and asked where this skill may be needed and valued in the community.

While it didn't happen right away and there were many bumps along the road, the woman was introduced to an organization that welcomed newcomers to Canada and she began volunteering. Over time, it was evident that this role has become a deeply meaningful and valued social role for her and she is now part of a community of people that she would not otherwise have spent time in. Her contribution has enhanced the organizations' services and led to long term, natural relationships and even a couple of summers of part time employment for her so far.

When thinking about social roles, the possibilities are only limited by your imagination. As you begin to discuss social roles with people you support, remember that they are in charge! You can't create social roles but you can encourage, educate, support and cheer people on! Remember that people may have limited experience or exposure and may not know what could be possible.

You have a critical role in helping the person leverage their skills, talents and interests into valued social roles that unlock the good things in life!

Thanks so much for watching this e-learning module! Come back soon!