

# Peeling Back the Layers: Unpacking and Combatting the Infantilization of People with Intellectual Disabilities



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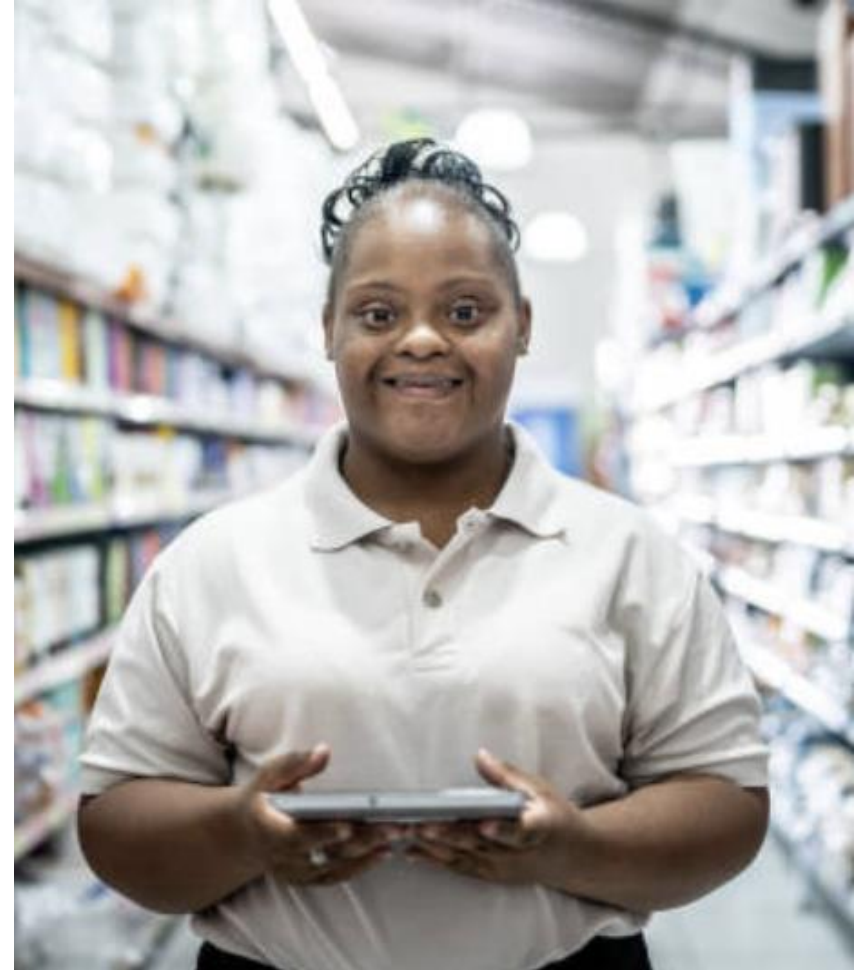
# Infantilization

→ Treating someone as a child or in a way which denies their maturity in age or experience.



# Infantilization, Race, and Gender

- Disability status, race, and gender layer to create the perfect storm of infantilization
- This is seen at the societal, organizational, and person level
- Like gender and race, infantilization is society's way of making people with disabilities feel othered



# Society's Treatment of People with Disabilities

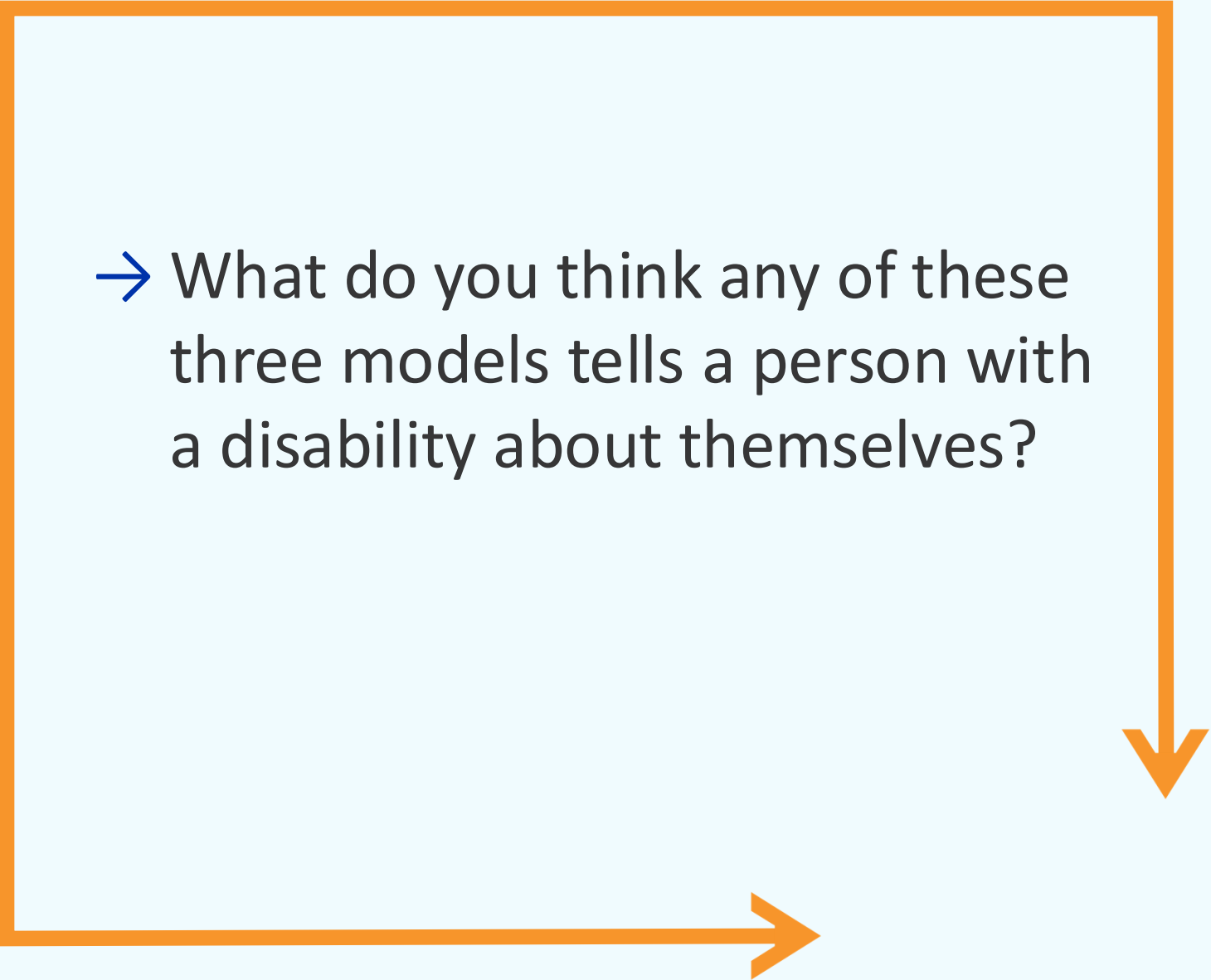
**Religious/ Moral  
Model**

**Pity/Charity Model**

**Medical Model**

# Chatbox Question #1

→ What do you think any of these three models tells a person with a disability about themselves?



# A Day in the Life



## Chatbox Question #2

→ How did you see Steven being infantilized in the video “A Day in the Life”?

**Infantilization at the Societal Level**





# Sheltered Workshops



- An organization that employs people with disabilities separately from others, usually with exemptions from labor standards, including but not limited to the absence of minimum wage requirements

# Images of Sheltered Workshops



# Jerry Lewis MDA Labor Day Telethon



- From 1954-2018 this show defined the genre of telethons
- The telethon focused exclusively on children with “muscular dystrophy”
- Pity was used to raise money

# Guardianship

- A guardian is a person who has been appointed by the court to make decisions on behalf of an adult who is deemed in need of a guardian
- The guardian may have a say over many parts of the adult's life



# Denial of Sex Education



- Denied information about sex, sexuality, and healthy relationships
- Denied contraceptives
- Dignity of risk

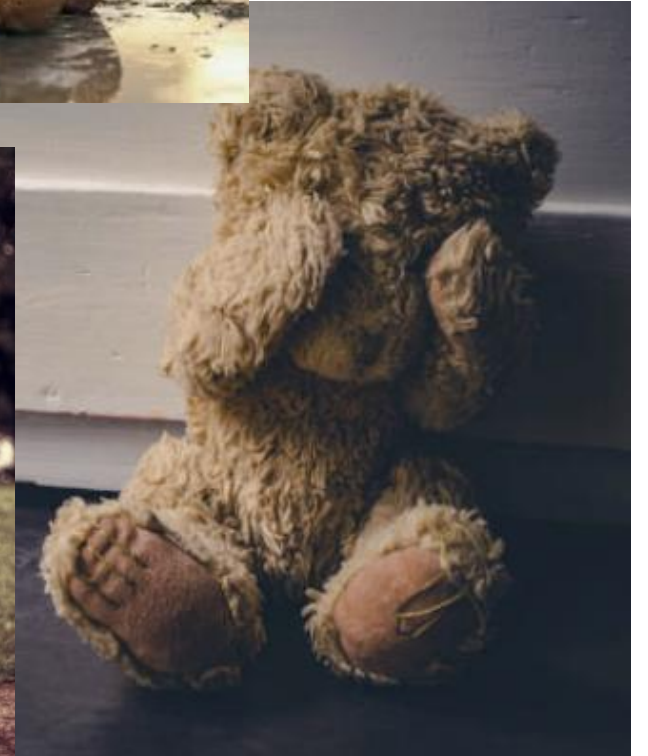
# Relationships in Group Homes



- A group home is a living situation for a group of people with similar disabilities within a residence
- Not allowed to have relationships or sex in the group home
- Not allowed to share a bed
- Denied access to privacy

# Mandatory Reporting

- A variety of of policies, practices, and laws that require certain people to report specific harms to government agencies
- 50% of survivors have said it made the abuse worse



**Infantilization at the Organizational Level**





# Organizational Level

- Attitudinal barriers within the program
- Not including people with ID in your work
- Not thinking about people with ID in your outreach and services
- Focusing only on children





**Infantilization at the Personal Level**

# Personal Level

- Tone of voice
- Making assumptions about ability
- Over-reliance on support people
- Praising people doing everyday tasks or accomplishments
- Feeling pity
- How you talk to and about people with disabilities
- Assuming parental or marital status

# The Antidote to Infantilization



# Antidotes

- Surface your bias
- Get educated
- Collaborate with other service providers
- Talk to people with disabilities
- Audit your program and materials
- Build genuine relationships with people with disabilities



# **Society's Treatment of People with Disabilities, Revisited**

**Pity/Charity Model**

**Medical Model**

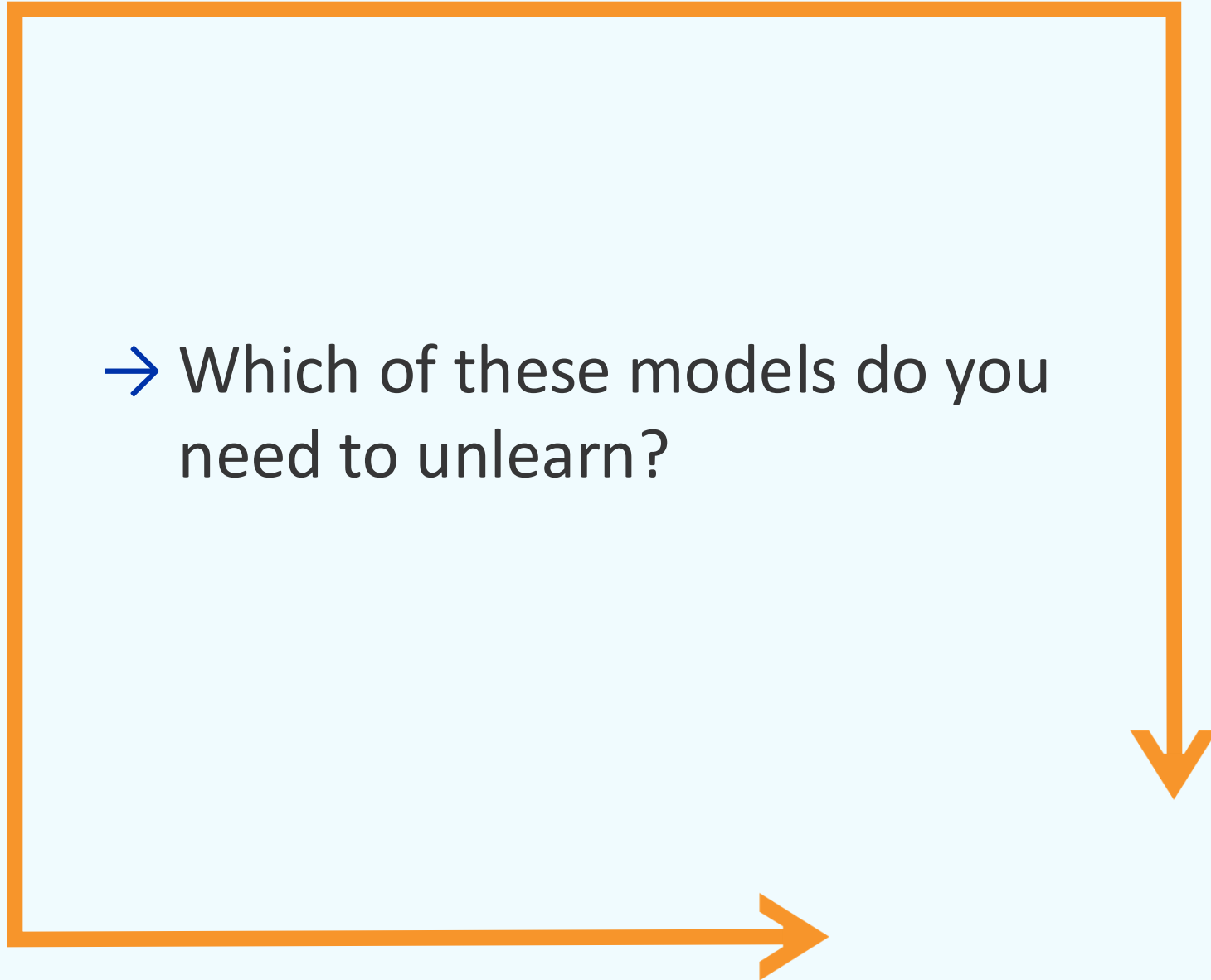
**Religious/Moral  
Model**

**Social Model**

# Chatbox

## Question #3

→ Which of these models do you need to unlearn?



**Questions?**





# References

- [The Disabled Community Doesn't Want Your Pity](#)
- [Mandatory Reporting is Not Neutral](#)
- [Missouri Allows Some Disabled Workers to Earn Less Than \\$1 an Hour. The State Says It's Fine If That Never Changes](#)
- [What the Disability Community Told Us About Sheltered Workshops](#)
- ['May we please have sex tonight?' – people with learning difficulties pursuing privacy in residential group settings](#)
- [Supported Decision Making & the Problems of Guardianship](#)

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