

Handout **Models of disability**

There are many different ways of looking at disability. Here are two of them.

1 **The medical model of disability:**

- looks at *what is wrong* with a disabled person and identifies what they cannot do
- leads people to think that impairments can be cured, managed or treated
- sees disabled people who do not 'recover' or respond to treatment as a problem.
- expects disabled people to have their problems solved, and to become 'normal' before they are able to fit into society.

Medical model thinking

The focus is on what is 'wrong' with the person, what they 'can't do'.

The impairment is the problem and attention is spent on fixing, treating or curing it.

The person becomes invisible, isolated and cut off from mainstream society.

Disabled people are seen as passive receivers of services aimed at cure or management.



2 The social model of disability:

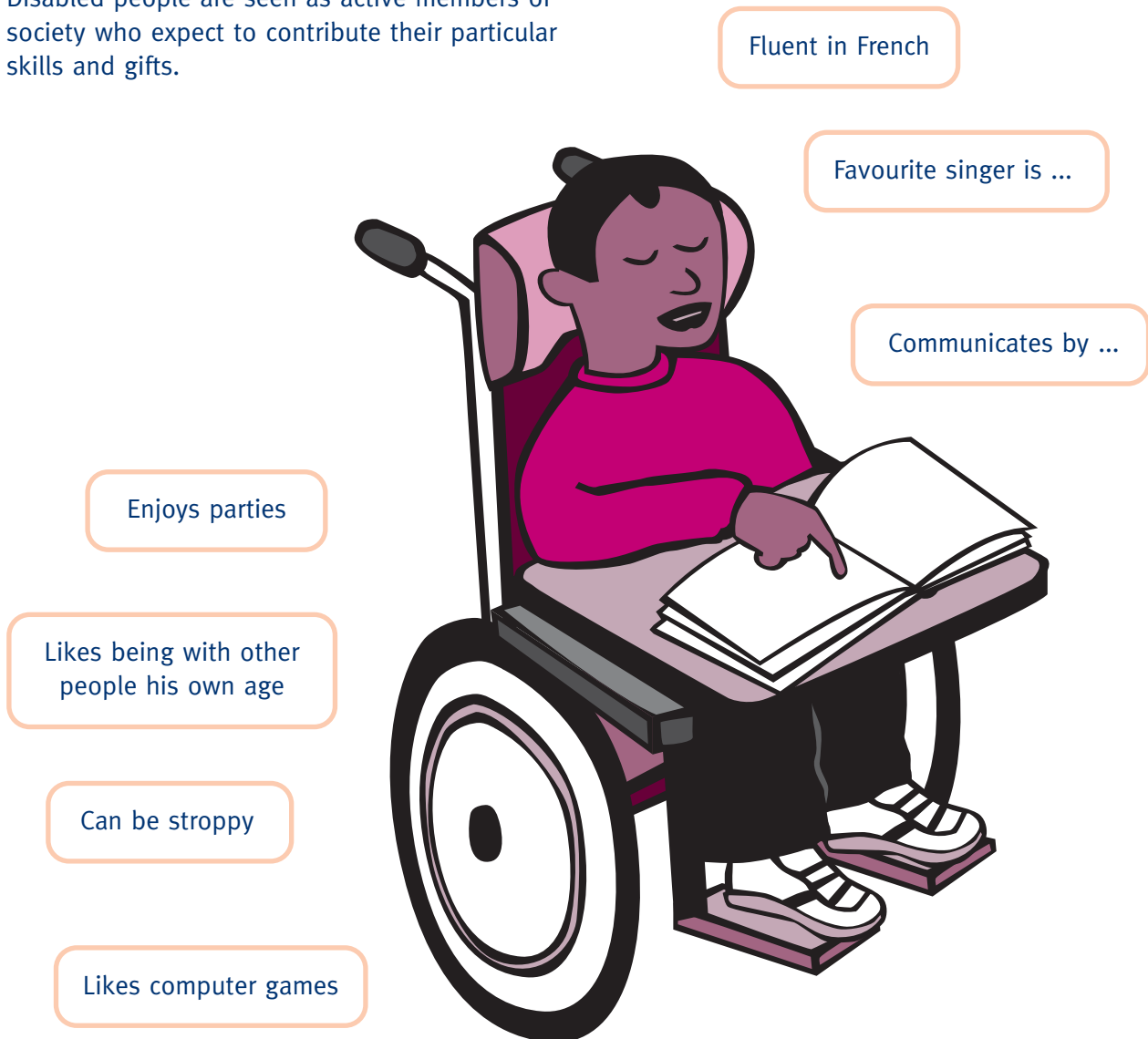
- makes a clear distinction between *impairment* and *disability*
- accepts that impairment and chronic illness sometimes pose real difficulties
- focuses on people's strengths and what they can do
- believes that disability is created by a lack of understanding and awareness and by barriers within the environment
- believes that it is society that needs to be changed – not the impairments.

Social model thinking

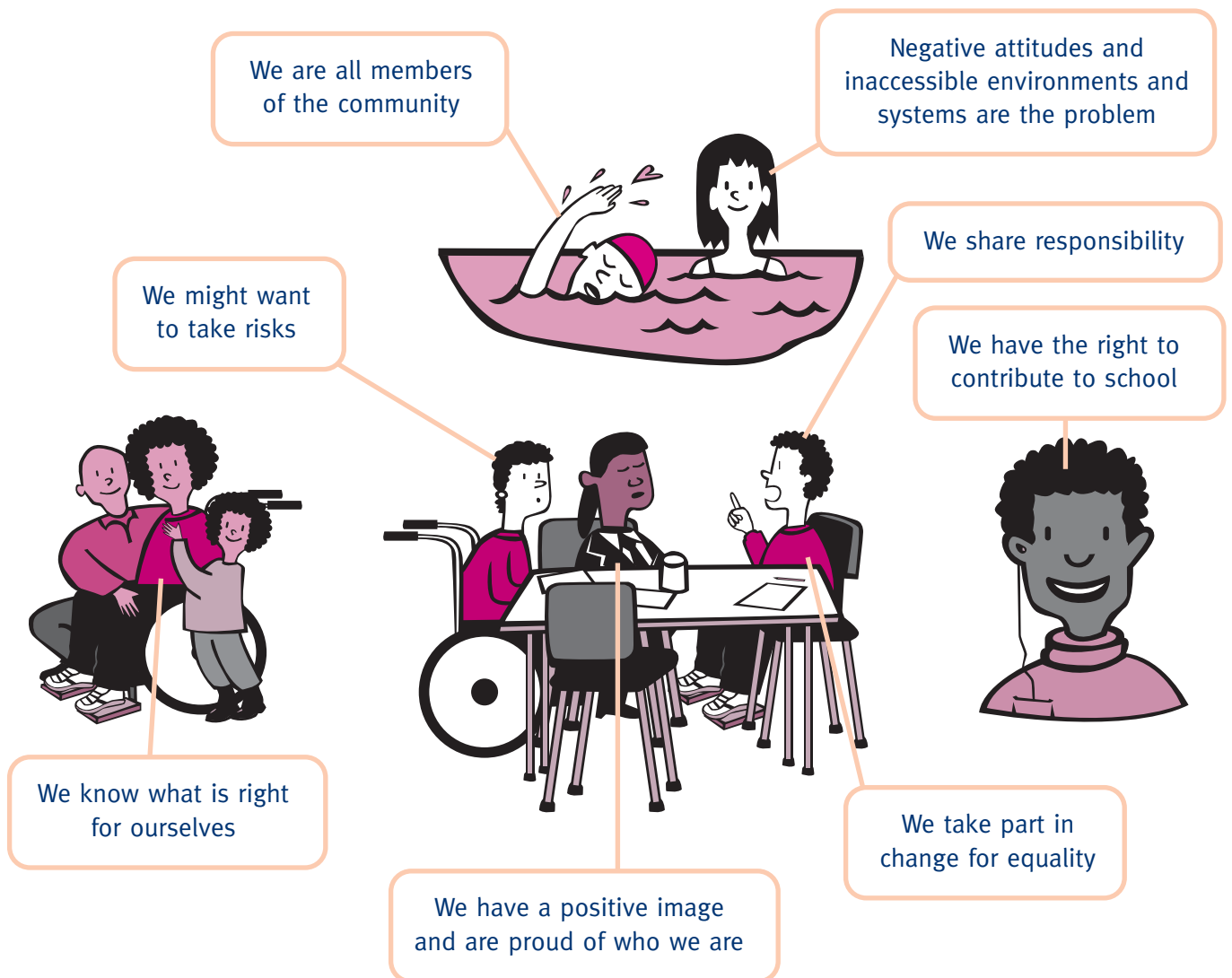
The focus is on who the person is.

Attention is put on their likes/dislikes, dreams/aspirations and how to support them.

Disabled people are seen as active members of society who expect to contribute their particular skills and gifts.



Disabled people – the way we see it



What the social model of disability means for school councils

A school council that adopts the social model of disability:

- believes that every pupil has the right to belong to, and to be valued in, every aspect of their school life
- makes the strengths of the pupil and what they *can* do the starting point, rather than their impairments and what they *can't* do
- recognises different pupils' needs and learning styles in planning effective inclusive activities
- identifies barriers that prevent a pupil from taking part in any activity and makes every effort to remove them
- provides positive images of disabled people throughout the school.

There is evidence that this approach can work. Twenty-five years ago girls were lagging behind boys in maths, science, design and technology. A conscious effort was made throughout the school system to challenge discriminatory and sexist organisation and thinking. Now that the barriers have been removed, girls out-perform boys in all these areas.