

## 8 Signs a Claimant is Developing a "Disability Mindset"

Individuals applying for Social Security Disability (SSDI) face many challenges as they battle health conditions that prevent them from working. These obstacles, coupled with financial strain and uncertainty about the future, leave SSDI claimants susceptible to developing a “disability mindset” – which happens when an ill or injured individual becomes focused on their limitations and perceived weaknesses instead of their abilities. A person with a disability mindset can begin to experience additional mental and physical health challenges. It is important to recognize some of the signs and triggers of the disability mindset so claimants who are struggling can receive the help and encouragement they need.

### 1 They are focused on their disability, rather than their capabilities.

Instead of focusing on what they can do well or improvements they are making, claimants who are developing a disability mindset may only be able to see the limitations of their condition(s). They can begin to focus squarely on the negative and frustrating events in their daily life, such as when they are unable to cook their own dinner, drive themselves to an appointment, or complete the requirements of their job. All of this can diminish their ability to see or believe that they can be successful, despite the many things they are still able to do.

### 2 They fear being defined by their disabling condition(s).

In addition to being overly critical of themselves, claimants developing a disability mindset are more likely to fear that friends, family, and colleagues have disregarded them or labeled them as “disabled” permanently. While it is true that many disabled individuals need help completing some daily tasks, it is easy for able-bodied individuals to assume that a disabled person’s limitations are all-encompassing. In reality, many disabled individuals grow and adapt, ultimately learning new ways to complete many of their daily tasks, but even if a condition(s) prevent such development, the prospect of being defined by their disabling condition(s) can lead claimants to believe that their disability will always overshadow their abilities. Therefore, it is important for a claimant’s family, friends, and their disability representatives to try to view things from their perspective and help encourage them to maintain a positive outlook as much as possible.

### 3 Feelings of shame or inadequacy become more prominent.

Shame may not be visible or obvious to others, but it can be chronic – and may be just as painful for a claimant to live with as the disabling health condition(s) cited on their SSDI application. Feelings of shame are dangerous, as they can continue to grow and lead to other health issues like depression, anxiety, and an overall decreased quality of life. Claimants who are wrestling with feelings of shame or inadequacy may become less energetic or enthusiastic about their SSDI claim or any effort that may be underway to improve their health or financial position for fear that they will be unable to succeed or will become a burden to others.

### 4 The claimant develops ongoing anxiety.

Just like feelings of shame, claimants developing a disability mindset may be experiencing increased anxiety, which they can often keep private from the people around them. If claimants are developing increased anxiety, they may begin to experience other life-altering symptoms like insomnia, nightmares, panic attacks, and uncontrollable thoughts that can exacerbate their worries and fears about the future. Ultimately, this leaves them vulnerable to developing a disability mindset, or potential attempts to harm themselves. Ensuring that claimants know they are not alone and reminding them of support groups and other resources can provide them with the sense of community and safety that they may truly need when battling severe anxiety.

### 5 Becoming healthy enough to resume “normal” life feels impossible.

Many individuals applying for SSDI are facing a long road to recovery, and some must come to terms with the knowledge that they will endure lifelong health challenges. If improving their health and regaining their lifestyles feels too overwhelming, their drive to get well can dwindle rapidly. Additionally, if claimants want to get better, but do not believe they are able to resume their previous functionality, they can begin to feel intimidated by the prospect of returning to a “normal” life and the amount of work it could take to get there.

### 6 Efforts to return to the workforce cease.

In addition to battling their own doubts about their abilities to return to work and “normal” daily activities, many disabled people feel dissuaded from trying to return to work after months or years of feeling pitied, judged, or forgotten by their employers, colleagues, and friends. In many cases, a claimant’s previous role may no longer be available, or an employer is not able to make the accommodations necessary to successfully resume and retain work. Losing contact with co-workers can also make claimants feel alienated and reduce their drive to return to work. Even if a claimant does technically possess the physical ability to resume employment, these painful circumstances can make the avoidance of work feel like the safest choice, ultimately contributing to the development of a disability mindset.

### 7 Feelings of hopelessness and depression begin to emerge.

Not only are SSDI claimants more likely to develop feelings of anxiety and inadequacy as months and years pass and they remain unable to work, but they are also at increased risk of becoming depressed. Depression can lead claimants to not only lose hope for the future, but also lose sight of their many past accomplishments – including the families and friends they have made. Depression can cause people to withdraw from those around them because they do not believe that they can ever be truly happy again. This can seriously strain a claimant’s relationships with the people who are trying to provide support on the journey to physical and financial recovery, which could make the SSDI application process even more exacerbating and contribute to the claimant’s disability mindset and sense of hopelessness.

### 8 They feel judged and stigmatized for their disability.

Unfortunately, a great deal of stigma is often still attached to disability, as many people assume that disabled individuals cannot enjoy a full life because of the limitations they face. Frustration is frequently reported by individuals with “unseen” disabilities who experience various forms of harassment, including pressure to “prove” that they are disabled. Being misjudged and scrupulously examined by others can contribute to a claimant’s negative self-perception and disability mindset. Reminding claimants that disabilities are far more common than many people realize, and that there are many resources designed to help them regain their independence, can boost their self confidence and help prevent or change a disability mindset.

We hope this SSDI Navig8or has helped you learn more about the claimant experience and how to help individuals who are struggling with mental, emotional, and physical health challenges during the SSDI application process. If you'd like to do more research or read testimonials from disabled individuals who have wrestled with a disability mindset, here are some articles we recommend:

[Discarding the “disability mindset”](#)

[Maintaining a positive mindset when living with a disability](#)

[Growing out of the “disability mindset”](#)