



Abortion

What is the issue?

Disability—its diagnosed presence or its predicted likelihood—is often cited as a rationale for abortion, especially when the prognosis associated with a given disability is potentially severe. For example, while data on the United States is limited, the most recent [study estimates](#) abortion rates following prenatal diagnoses have resulted in reducing the overall population of persons with Down syndrome by 30%. As usage of prenatal screening increases, research predicts termination rates will also increase as demonstrated by more [reliable studies](#) in the [European context](#), which have consistently indicated an approximately 90-92% termination rate for preborn children diagnosed with Down syndrome. In fact, in 2017 it was reported that the nation of [Iceland had nearly “eradicated” Down syndrome](#) within its borders through the use of [prenatal testing and abortion](#).

What do I need to know about the issue?

Abortion on the basis of disability is commonly justified as a means of preventing suffering, especially in cases of severe disability—which, it is assumed, involve significantly increased levels of suffering and decreased quality of life. In response, disability advocates point out that it is all too easy to overestimate the “burden” or “suffering” associated with disability, and to underestimate the quality of life enjoyed by persons with

disabilities and their families. Indeed, [research](#) shows that people with disabilities consistently rate their own quality of life higher than do those around them, including their medical and other professional caregivers.

Second, disability advocates also [argue](#), the “suffering” associated with disability is often more the result of unthinking and uncaring social practices—even outright discrimination and oppression—than the result of disability per se. Considered in this light, the suffering (if any) associated with disability is an argument for changing social structures and practices so that they are more welcoming of persons with disabling conditions, rather than killing those same persons in the name of “preventing suffering.”

From a biblically-informed, Christian perspective all human persons, including those with disabilities, are made in the image of God and bear that image equally and fully. They are, therefore, valuable not because of their abilities, but because they are image bearers of their Creator ([Genesis 1:27](#); [Genesis 9:6](#); [Jeremiah 1:5](#); [Job 12:10](#); [Acts 17:28](#)). Bearing the image of God confers an inviolable dignity upon human beings: we belong to God—our lives are not our own—and human life is not ours to dispose of as we wish ([Deuteronomy 32:39](#)). Consequently, when we intentionally

end the life of a preborn child—with or without a disabling condition—we claim a right that is not ours to assume. Moreover, from a Christian perspective “weakness” and “suffering” are not things to be avoided at all costs. Instead, our own weaknesses often provide the greatest opportunity for God’s strength and power to be manifested, thereby bringing glory to him ([2 Corinthians 12:9-10](#)). This is just one of the ways in which God redeems the suffering and difficulties we face in life—including the challenges associated with having a disability.

What can I do about the issue?

- *Get to know and form genuine [friendships](#) with persons affected by disability.*
- *[Organize](#) people in your church to help meet the needs of people affected by disability.*
- *[Educate](#) yourself and others on the issues, and [advocate](#) for a culture of life.*
- *Support your local [Crisis Pregnancy Center](#) financially or by volunteering your time.*
- *Consider fostering or [adopting](#) a special needs child.*

This document is a condensed version of a full-length Policy Brief on the same topic. It is available, along with other Briefs and additional resources, at <https://www.joniandfriends.org/public-policy/>. For more information contact the Joni and Friends Public Policy Center by email at publicpolicy@joniandfriends.org.