



(From left) DP Samaddar, medical director, Peerless Hospital; Papiya Khawash, developmental paediatrician; Anindita Chatterjee, coordinator, child guidance clinic; and Amit Roy, paediatrician, attend the programme at Peerless Hospital

Parents hesitate to get disability card: Experts

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Calcutta: Parents are often reluctant to apply for the Unique Disability Identity (UDID) card for their children due to fears of stigmatisation and labelling, according to those working with individuals with disabilities.

The card, however, is a tool that provides access to allowances, benefits, and legal rights, said a panellist at an autism awareness programme on Saturday.

"A section of parents, not all, feel that if they obtain a UDID or disability certificate for their children, they would be labelled. But what they fail to understand is that it is a requirement for exemptions in public examinations and reservations in employment," said Chaitali Gami, a board member of The National Trust, a statutory body set up for the welfare of persons with autism, cerebral palsy and other disabilities.

Gami, a disability rights advocate, said a UDID card enables board examinees to apply for extra time or a scribe.

"A person wears spectacles because they need them. Similarly, these are requirements. Sometimes, by the time a parent realises this, it is already delayed. Many parents are not even aware that their children

have rights to exemptions," she said.

The barriers also stem from denial of the child's condition, Gami added.

"It is a kind of non-acceptance. If a parent can accept the child's condition, then why would they not use a tool that helps the child move forward in life? If there is no shame in wearing glasses or using a walking stick, there should be no shame in obtaining a unique ID," she said.

Society often creates more barriers by stigmatising disabilities.

Peerless Hospital organised an autism awareness initiative to empower parents to mark World Autism Awareness Day.

An initiative of the Child Guidance Clinic at the hospital, the interactive programme titled Autism and Humanity-Every Life Has Value, aimed to empower parents, caregivers, and educators while strengthening the support system for children with autism and developmental challenges.

Gami's session focused on disability cards, legal guardianship, long-term care planning, and practical guidance for families navigating disability certification.

"Many children who come to us are around two or three

years old. Many parents question why they need a disability card or legal guardianship. The stigma is deep-rooted, and they are not comfortable with the idea that people will know their child has autism," said Anindita Chatterjee, coordinator of the Child Guidance Clinic at Peerless Hospital.

Not all children with autism are easily identifiable, which could make them more visible and subject to stigmatisation — a fear many parents share, said Chatterjee.

The fear is often justified because society remains exclusionary and ruthless.

The workshop also emphasised the importance of early identification, speech and language development, parent coping strategies, and long-term care planning.

"Early identification, timely intervention, and collaborative efforts between parents, educators, and healthcare professionals can significantly improve outcomes and help children realise their full potential. We are dedicated to empowering families through awareness, multidisciplinary care, and compassionate support, because every child deserves understanding, acceptance, and the opportunity to thrive," said D.P. Samaddar, medical director, Peerless Hospital.