

INCLUSION TIPS: **TERMINOLOGY: Putting People First**

Disability and Appropriate Language

Language reflects and shapes the way we view the world. The words we use can influence community attitudes in a positive or negative way and can impact on the lives of others.

How we write and speak about people with a disability can have a profound effect on the way they are viewed by the community. Some words can degrade and diminish a person while others perpetuate inaccurate stereotypes, removing entirely a person's individuality and humanity.

Over the years, people with disabilities have endured a variety of labels that serve to set them apart from the rest of the community. Even today, people are still identified by their 'disabling' condition—all too often we hear a 'paraplegic' for a person who has a paraplegia; a 'cerebral palsy sufferer' for a person living with cerebral palsy or a 'Down Syndrome baby' for a baby with Down Syndrome.

This labeling influences our perceptions by focusing only on one aspect of a person, their disability and ignores their other roles and attributes, for example they may also be a parent, a teacher, musician or an athlete.

Putting people first is a simple rule of thumb—acknowledge the person before the disability.

Guidelines

- Avoid defining a person by their disability. We are all individuals with abilities, desires, interests and problems—some of us happen to have a disability.
- Avoid focusing unnecessarily on a person's disability. If it is not necessary to acknowledge that a person has a disability, then don't mention it.
- Portray people with disabilities positively by recognising what a person can do rather than focusing on their limitations for example, the person walks with an aid, not that he or she has limited mobility
- Recognise that many of the difficulties facing people with a disability are barriers created by community attitudes and the physical environment. We can all help to break down these barriers by using appropriate language—to be labeled in a derogatory way serves only to perpetuate these barriers.
- Be specific about a person's circumstances and avoid stereotypes, generalisations and assumptions based on limited information.
- Avoid any word or phrase that has a negative connotation or that implies people with a disability are suffering—for example 'confined to a wheelchair' instead of 'uses a wheelchair'



WORDS TO AVOID

WORDS TO USE

Abnormal; cripple or crippled; mentally retarded, moron

Put the person first and specify the need or disability. For example a person who uses a wheelchair, person with cerebral palsy

Defect (as In birth defect, congenital defect)

Say the 'person with a disability since birth', person with a congenital disability'

Unfortunate; victim; suffer or suffering from; afflicted with; disease; illness; patient; in a vegetative state, invalid

Put the person first and be specific eg. Person with Down Syndrome

Note: Patient is appropriate when referring to a doctor/patient relationship

Dwarf

Person who is short statured

Paraplegic

Person with paraplegia

Epileptic

Person with epilepsy

Fit/attack/spell

Seizure

Brain damaged

Person with an acquired brain injury

Handicapped

Handicapped is appropriate only if referring to a barrier facing people with a disability, for example, "... are handicapped by a lack of access."

Insane; lunatic; maniac; mental patient; neurotic; psycho; psychotic; schizophrenic; unsound mind; crazy; mad

Put the person first and be specific eg. Say 'a person with a mental illness'.

Terms beginning with 'the' such as 'the disabled' or the 'the blind'

Put the person first and be specific. Eg. People who are blind.

Cerebral palsy sufferer

Person with cerebral palsy

Confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair-bound

Is a wheelchair user, uses a wheelchair

Disabled toilets/parking

Accessible toilets/parking

* The information in this fact sheet is sourced from the Disability Services Commission, WA and the Australian Sports Commission's Disability Education Program.

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