Disability Language

Miranda Grunwell
269-345-1516 x120
grunwellm@dnswm.org
Definition of Disability

➢ Has a physical/mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities

➢ The ADA also protects:
  • Has a record of such impairment
  • Is regarded as having such an impairment
Independent Living Movement

• Civil rights movement of people of color and women’s equality
• People with disabilities saw they were also being oppressed and discriminated against
• Changes were demanded for better systems
Language can reveal ableism!

Words reflect our values and beliefs about disability.

We can consciously choose to use words and descriptions of disability that are neutral.

Our values and beliefs come out in our word choices.
Neutral words... or not?

What’s **wrong** with them?

That’s so **sad**/I’m so **sorry**

They **can’t** _______

special needs

high functioning/low functioning labels

hearing impaired/visually impaired
# Neutral Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words or phrases that show a negative view of people with disabilities</th>
<th>What we say to model language that is neutral and non-judgmental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped person, Differently abled person</td>
<td>Person with a disability, Disabled person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped parking, Handicapped bathrooms</td>
<td>Accessible parking, Accessible bathrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abled-bodied person, Normal person</td>
<td>Person without a disability, Non-disabled person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s crazy, That’s insane</td>
<td>That’s wild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disABILITY</td>
<td>Disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Accommodations</td>
<td>Accommodations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Person First vs. Identity First

Person First Language:

➢ Puts the person first

➢ Thought to eliminate assumptions by focusing on the person rather than the disability

➢ It indicates a disability as a secondary aspect of a person.

➢ “Person with a disability”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words or phrases that show a negative view of people with disabilities</th>
<th>What we say to model language that is neutral and non-judgmental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped person, Differently abled person</td>
<td>Person with a disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is down's</td>
<td>Has Down syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is learning disabled</td>
<td>Has a learning disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The blind</td>
<td>Person who is blind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain damaged person</td>
<td>Person with a brain injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal person</td>
<td>Person without a disability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Person First vs. Identity First

Identity First Language:

➢ Emphasizes disability as an identity

➢ Disability is seen as part of a personal identity that can’t be taken away.

➢ It indicates a disability as an inherent aspect of a person’s identity.

➢ “Disabled person”
# Identity First

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words or phrases that show a negative view of people with disabilities</th>
<th>What we say to model language that is neutral and non-judgmental</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Handicapped person, Differently abled person</td>
<td>Disabled person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is down’s</td>
<td>Down syndrome person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person with a learning disability</td>
<td>Learning disabled person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The blind</td>
<td>Blind person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brain damaged person</td>
<td>Brain injured person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal person</td>
<td>Non-disabled person</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Person First

Identity First
About Language

• People are too sensitive.
• It’s all about political correctness.
• It changes all the time; I can’t keep up!
• It’s not like I’m trying to offend someone.
• What’s the big deal?
• Americans are just getting soft.
Disability Etiquette 101

➢ Presume competence!
➢ Talk to the person.
➢ Ask the person to repeat something.
➢ It’s okay to use phrases that everyone uses.
➢ Get to know someone as a whole person.
➢ Don’t assume.
➢ Ask the person if they need assistance. If they say no, then that means NO.
Questions? Comments?

DISABILITYnetwork

Miranda Grunwell
grunwellm@dnswm.org
Additional Resources

- National Center on Disability and Journalism: https://ncdj.org/style-guide/
- Disability is Natural: https://www.disabilityisnatural.com/people-first-language.html
- The Body is not an Apology: https://thebodyisnotanapology.com/magazine/i-am-disabled-on-identity-first-versus-people-first-language/