

Inclusive and Welcoming Language

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"You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to desist from it"
(Pirke Avot 2:21)

Language is powerful. We recognize that preferred language changes as community culture evolves. Pirke Avot teaches us that it is our obligation to continue to strive for better, to communicate in the best manner possible and recognize that this may change over time and when engaging with different people. We won't always get it perfect, but we must continue to strive for the best. Everyone is a person, no matter their abilities or disabilities. People of all abilities get to choose how to refer to themselves. Even as we introduce any person we are with, someone with a disability has the opportunity to choose how they are described.

As a community, our language and actions should reflect recognizing all as humans and people first. When we identify people by their *disability* first (i.e. "disabled person"), we are *not* recognizing the fact that they are a person first. A disability is a part of who someone is, but not their only identifying factor. This idea is valuable in areas of inclusion. People of all abilities can *choose* how they want to be referred. If you mess up, don't worry! This document is meant to be read as a novice in the topic of disability. These are introductory tools to start the conversations in your community. We always defer to each person in determining how they would like to identify themselves.

When meeting someone with any type of disability, you may stop to think about how should I address or refer to this individual? Have you ever considered asking a person, "How would you like to be referred to?" Why would talking to someone with a disability be different than speaking with anyone else? We might consider asking someone, "Do you like to be called like Becca or Rebecca?" Someone with a disability should be awarded the same opportunity for preferred descriptors.

If you need to refer to someone's disability, it is okay to ask, "How would you like me to describe your disability?" This may feel uncomfortable, but this actually shows kavod (Respect) to the individuals. When in doubt, using Person First language is a great place to start. And please remember that we won't always get it perfect, but we must continue to strive for the best.

**Examples of People First Language (adapted and edited based off
Kathie Snow's <http://www.inclusioncollaborative.org/>)**

<u>To Use</u>	<u>Instead of</u>
Sam has higher support needs	He is a low functioning individual
Sam has an intellectual disability	She has a cognitive disability or is mentally retarded
Sam has a physical disability	They are crippled, disabled or handicapped
Sam has a congenital disability	He has a birth defect or brain damaged
Sam has a learning disability	She is learning disabled
Sam has a mental health condition	They are mentally ill, disturbed, or crazy
Sam has a developmental delay	He is developmentally delayed
Sam has autism	Sam is Autistic***
Sam has a diagnosis of (Cerebral palsy)	She has CP, She is a downs kid, She is learning disabled
Sam is of short stature	They are a midget, dwarf, or a little person
Participant, client, or member of the community	Consumer, recipient
Sam: uses a wheelchair, mobility chair or is a wheelchair user	He is wheelchair bound
Accessible parking or hotel room	Handicapped parking or hotel room
She communicates by...	She is non-verbal
Sam has diverse abilities	They have special needs
Children with and without disabilities	Normal, typical, or healthy children
Sam needs or Sam uses	He has a problem with, or he has special needs

***There is a community of individuals with Autism that prefers to be identified as "Autistics." If you are an individual who does not identify as part of this community, it is best to use people-first language.

