



THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS

HOW CAN YOU PROMOTE PUBLIC AWARENESS?

(adapted from the Down Syndrome Society of Rhode Island)

LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

- The correct name of this diagnosis is Down syndrome. There is no apostrophe (Down). The "s" in syndrome is not capitalized (syndrome).
- An individual with Down syndrome is an individual first and foremost. The emphasis should be on the person, not the disability. Down syndrome is just one of many words that can be used to describe a person. A child with Down syndrome, an adult with Down syndrome, or a person with Down syndrome is a more appropriate way to discuss a person with this condition.
- Words can create barriers, try to recognize that a child is "a child with Down syndrome, or that an adult "is an adult with Down syndrome". Children with Down syndrome grow into adults with Down syndrome, they do not remain "eternal children." Adults enjoy activities and companionship with adults.
- Encourage people to use person first language, i.e. The person with Down syndrome --- **NOT** the Down syndrome person! Identify individuals with Down syndrome as an individual, a friend, a student, or a family member.
- It is important to use the correct terminology. A person has mental retardation, rather than "suffers from," "is a victim of," "is diseased with", or afflicted by." A person with Down syndrome is not a "Downs."
- Every person has his/her own unique strengths, capabilities, and talents. Try not to use the clichés that are so common when describing an individual with Down syndrome. To assume all people have the same characteristics or abilities is degrading. Also, it reinforces the stereotype that "all kids with Down syndrome are the same".
- Most important, look at the person as an individual --- your child, your family member, your student, your friend. Proudly acknowledge their individuality and their accomplishment. Remember, persons with Down syndrome are more alike us than different. They have feelings too, and are hurt by cruelty, stares and name calling. They want to be included in your groups, not excluded.
- Distribute bookmarks, posters, language guidelines to your local schools, special education departments, libraries, etc. This is especially beneficial during October, which has been proclaimed yearly nationally as "Down Syndrome Awareness Month" since 1984.

Using Nonlabeling Language
("People First" Language)
by Thomas Mihail, Ph.D.

It may seem like simply playing with words at first; however, nonlabeling is a way of making a statement about your respect for people with special needs as individual human beings.

Labels (e.g., handicapped, disabled, impaired, learning disabled, mentally retarded, behavior disordered, hearing impaired, deaf, visually impaired, blind, physically handicapped, health impaired, severely handicapped, autistic, brain injured, gifted, talented) have become part of our language to describe people who have special needs.

Research has consistently demonstrated that labels promote: ignorance of individual differences; low expectations; "cookbook" approaches to teaching and learning; less individual instruction; self-fulfilling prophecies; negative self-concept; dependence and learned helplessness; name calling; shame, hurt, pain, self-pity, and self hatred; handicapism (like racism and sexism); segregation; systematic denial of civil rights; bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination; fear, pity, ridicule, and condescension.

Labels are currently a part of education's service-delivery system and our avoidance of them could create confusion within that existing system. However, there is something we can do...we can send a message to people that we don't approve of labeling individuals like jars and cans by using a different syntax when referring to people with special needs. And that message is: **Always refer to the person before the exceptionality.**

The following are examples of "People First" Language:

- The student labeled developmentally disabled
(instead of "the developmentally disabled student")

- The child who is learning disabled
(instead of "the learning disabled child")

- People who are severely handicapped
(instead of "severely handicapped persons")

The idea is to remember...**THEY ARE PEOPLE FIRST.** Using nonlabeling language as a syntactical message that we care about people is only a beginning. Hopefully, some day, we will be able to get rid of the labels themselves.

(Adapted from The Network News)