Inclusive Language Guide

Barkuma

Why does Inclusive Language matter?

Inclusive language is language that reflects diversity and respects individual preferences to identify with a particular community or characteristic. It avoids prejudiced, stereotyped, or discriminatory views of particular people or groups and puts the person first, enabling everyone to feel valued and respected. Inclusive language helps create a culture of mutual respect, dignity, inclusion, belonging, and community, fostering meaningful participation. Derogatory or discriminatory language perpetuates stereotypes and inequality in society, undervaluing individuals or groups and rendering them invisible, while inclusive language acknowledges unique values, cultures, and experiences. People with disabilities are often described in ways that are disempowering, discriminatory, degrading and offensive.

Principles of Inclusive Language

Inclusive language changes as we continue to evolve. Words that may be acceptable now may not be acceptable in the near future. It is our responsibility to ensure that our language stays up to date and reflects the preferences of the time. Our top tips to ensure inclusive language:

Principles of Inclusive Language:

- Always be respectful
- Ask about language preferences
- avoid stereotypes
- use person-centric language
- be conscious of the implications of your language
- sensitively correct inappropriate language
- be aware of context

Many people with disabilities prefer the social model of disability. This approach focuses on the way society and the environment create barriers that limit their participation. In contrast, the medical model of disability concentrates on what is deemed ‘wrong’ with the person rather than what they need.

In Australia, both person-first and identity-first language are used to refer to people with disabilities, and it's important to respect each individual's language choice.

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

Person-first language is a way of prioritising the individual over their disability and aims to prevent the person from being reduced or defined by their disability.
EG - "person with reduced mobility" "person with autism".

IDENTITY-FIRST LANGUAGE

Identity-first language emphasises the disability as part of their identity, and may be used as a way of recognising their membership within a larger group/community.
EG - “deaf person” "I am an autistic person".

Inclusive Language Tips

18.3% of Australians live with a disability affecting their daily activities, but not all disabilities are readily apparent or visible.

- Avoid language that portrays people with disabilities as victims or heroes.
- Avoid using terms that frame disability as a limitation, like "suffers from," "disabled," "wheelchair-bound," "special," or "normal."
- Avoid implying that people with disabilities are inspirational simply for living with a disability.
- Pay attention to words and expressions that may be upsetting for people with lived experience of mental illness, such as "crazy," "mental," or "psycho."
- Only mention a person's disability when it is relevant to the conversation or context.
- Respect people's preferences for language choices, such as person-first or identity-first language.
- If you're unsure, ask the person how they would like to be referred to.

Recommended language:

- Person with intellectual disability
- Has (insert name of condition)
- A person who uses a mobility aid
- Wheelchair user
- High/low support needs
- Neurodivergent (A person who has a learning disability or other sensory/ emotional regulation)
- Neurotypical (A person who is not autistic or otherwise neurodivergent)
- Neurodiverse can be used when discussing a group of people where some people are neurotypical and others are neurodivergent. It covers all the variety of brains within the group.

Language to avoid:

- Wheelchair-bound / Confined to a wheelchair
- Special needs
- High/low functioning
- Suffers from... Afflicted by... Victim of... (insert name of condition)
- Infantilizing language – talking to or about an adult with a disability using child-like terms ie “good girl”, “cute”, “isn’t that adorable”
- Normal (when referring to a person without a disability)