‘Know My Rights’

Information Leaflet 6

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE!

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Language is important to us all because it helps to convey ideas and build up images. When it comes to speaking about ‘disability’ or ‘disabled people’ too many people still employ language which encourages people to work with negative and misleading stereotyped images of disabled people. Disabled people’s experiences of living with impairment vary greatly; therefore, the use of emotive language often distorts the reality of these experiences. By asking people to ‘mind your language’, disabled people are not trying to enforce the straight jacket of ‘political correctness’, but rather to encourage people to portray them in a more meaningful and realistic way.

This Information Leaflet offers some useful suggestions on how to avoid misrepresenting disabled people.

**Confusing disabled people’s impairment or condition with their experience of disability**

_USER_ Pat’s disability is ....

_USER_ Pat’s impairment or condition is ...

**Remember to only speak about a person’s impairment or condition IF it is relevant to the situation!**

_USER_ Pat, who has cerebral palsy, has a degree in History

_USER_ Pat has a degree in History

_USER_ Jill, who has a visual impairment, requires her newsletter on tape
Dehumanising labels

.sprites {display: inline-block; width: 22px; height: 22px; margin-right: 10px; vertical-align: middle; }

:sad: the disabled
:sad: disabled people

(The term ‘people with disabilities’ is an alternative, however, many disabled people object to its usage as they believe it confuses the existence of an impairment with the experience of disabling barriers – “I have an impairment; not a disability, because I experience disability as a form of social restriction”)

:sad: the blind
:sad: people with visual impairments or visually impaired people or blind people

:sad: the deaf
:sad: deaf people or Deaf people or the Deaf (meaning members of the Deaf community who use British Sign Language)

:sad: mentally handicapped
:sad: people with learning difficulties* or people with a learning disability

*NB: sometimes the term ‘learning difficulty’ is used to refer to people who have difficulty with standard educational learning, e.g. people with dyslexia.
Language which is degrading or inappropriate because of the messages it conveys

👩‍.tp cripple
👨‍.tp disabled person

👩‍.tp handicap/handicapped
👨‍.tp disability/disabled

👩‍.tp she’s a spastic
👨‍.tp she’s a person with cerebral palsy

👩‍.tp he’s deaf and dumb
👨‍.tp he’s a Deaf person (without oral speech)

👩‍.tp confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair bound

👨‍.tp a wheelchair user (a wheelchair provides mobility rather than denying it!)

👩‍.tp disabled toilet
👨‍.tp accessible toilet

👩‍.tp defected
👨‍.tp impaired
Emotive languages which equates ‘disability’ with ‘tragedy’

😊 suffers from
😊 the person has

😊 sufferer
😊 the person has

😊 afflicted by
😊 the person has

Many disabled people would be happy 😊 never having to hear the following type of words or phrases used:

😊 victim
😊 tragic
😊 people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

😊 has mobility problems
😊 has limited mobility

😊 has special needs
😊 requires adjustments due to disabling barriers
Language which is used in relation to ‘mental health’

People who have illnesses or experiences which affect their mental health are also subjected to negative and offensive language. Historically, society’s response to issues relating to ‘mental health’ have often been disabling for people who have been on the receiving end of them. It is still too common to hear people talk about someone as being a nutter or headcase, mad or a loony.

There is no firm agreement on what is the most appropriate terminology because many different illnesses and experiences are covered by the broad area known as ‘mental health’. The most common terminology used in official circles is a person with mental health problems or difficulties, however, many people believe this terminology merely reinforces a negative set of images. Self-organised groups of people who have experienced the mental health system refer to themselves as survivors.

Although there appears to no firm agreement on what the most appropriate language or terminology, it is possible to use language in a sensitive and straight forwarded manner which avoids causing offensive or misrepresents people whose mental health has affected them. Here are a few suggestions:

😊 Only refer to someone’s medical condition where it is relevant.

😊 Avoid using language which can be misunderstood or wrongly interpreted.

😊 Avoid using the term mental patient

Unfortunately, these examples are only a sample of the type of negative words that are employed. Disabled people do not want to lose their identity - they are disabled people, however, this identity must always be placed within a meaningful and non-judgmental context. If you have any doubts about the type of language you wish to use; approach the disabled person you are going to work with or a disabled people’s organisation for their advice.
I am more than Autism

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