

POLITICALLY CORRECT LANGUAGE

Creating Lifelong Positive Images:

What is politically correct language and why is it important? Most people do not want to offend a person with disability or any other minority but are not sure of the correct terminology.

Politically correct language is the basis for advocacy with any minority group... it empowers minorities by creating a positive image that allows people to focus on abilities and see the person not their gender, skin color or disability.

“Image” is the key word in discussing the effects of positive or negative language on individuals or groups. What image does a word create? We all have a photo album of images in our mind that we associate with words.

The concept of “Image” is a means to clearly express the relationship between words and the perceptions that people have about words in their brains photo-albums. An image that is connected to a word is developed at a young age through a child’s experiences and parental influences.

We hear a word, usually an adjective, and consciously or subconsciously we associate the word with a positive or negative image that our minds have created. These images are usually in the form of a picture that are a part of schema or photo album that our life experiences, culture and family influences have created. The most negative words associated with any minority would not have a pleasant image attached to the majority of people’s or their culture’s photo-album. So when people use a derogatory word in reference to a minority group they can intentionally or unintentionally stigmatize and perpetuate negative stereotypes.

People are not born with prejudice or negative stereotypes towards different cultures and minorities. These are learned behaviors and if people are informed about the power of language and can instill positive images in their photo album then prejudice and the need for advocacy for minorities may be reduced or eliminated.

LANGUAGE AS IT RELATES TO DISABILITIES

The following is a list of language that promotes negative stereotypes, has negative connotations and allows people to focus on disability.

CRIPPLE:

Cripple is the most offensive word that anyone could use in reference to people with disabilities because of the negative connotations that are attached to it. This is the word that was used to describe people with disabilities when they were an embarrassment to families, kept locked in the back room, killed at birth, shunned and treated as sub humans.

Close your eyes and picture the word “Cripple” and think about what images you attach to it. For most people it would not be positive picture. This is why the word “Cripple” should never be used in reference to people with disabilities. It is a degrading, offensive word because of the way it stigmatizes people with disabilities; there can be no proper context for its use.

HANDICAP:

Handicap is an offensive word to people with disabilities. Its origins came from the time of the height of discrimination against people with disabilities before social programs were developed when people disabilities, in order to survive, had to stand with “cap-in-hand” on the street begging.

CONFINED TO A WHEELCHAIR:

For a person with a disability a wheelchair is freedom that allows you to go places; not having a wheelchair would be confinement. When you picture the word “Confined” images of prison come to mind or perhaps somebody tied to a post with duct-tape not the freedom a wheelchair gives people.

SPECIAL NEEDS:

The word “Special” has negative connotations attached to it for people with physical disabilities. If you hear the word “Special” if in reference to people with physical disabilities most people, if they close their eyes and look at their photo album, will picture an intellectual disability which is a stereotype people with physical disabilities have been fighting for years. There’s nothing special about needing a lever door handle, a bigger bathroom or a ramp to enter a building; they’re just needs to create equality.

DISABLED PEOPLE:

You should not use “Disabled People” because it puts the disability a head of the person. People and organizations that provide advocacy want the public to see the person first and disability second; we are people who happen to have a disability.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES:

People with disabilities is the politically correct term to use; this puts the focus on the person, who just happens to have a disability, and allows us to celebrate their abilities which creates a positive image.

People with disabilities have the same wants and needs as everybody else in society so let’s focus on the person, enjoy their abilities and eliminate labels. The best way to refer to a person with a disability is by using their name.