

## Language Guidelines

Disability is a natural part of the human condition. Disability is a human diversity characteristic.

The language we use around disability should reflect those values.

Language around disability should be neutral and not laden with value judgments or adjectives that are negative.

### Words we will ask you not use & to find other ways to describe what you mean:

High functioning/low functioning

Handicapped

Normal

Birth defect

Retarded

Suffers from

Afflicted with

(*disability*) Victim

Severe (*disability*)

Impaired

Special needs

Wheelchair bound/confined to wheelchair

*Wrong with* him/her/them

Using labels like *ADHD*, *OCD*, *schizophrenic*, etc when not referring to a disability

Saying *crazy*, *insane*, *paralyzed* or *blind* as adjectives in everyday speech

**Language around disability should focus on how someone does something not around the way they cannot do things.**

*Micah uses a wheelchair instead of Micah can't walk*

### Disability Network Southwest Michigan

**Kalamazoo Office:** 517 E. Crosstown Parkway, Kalamazoo, MI 49001 **ph:**(269) 345-1516

**Berrien/Cass Office:** 2900 Lakeview Avenue, St. Joseph, MI 49085 **ph** (269) 985-0111

[www.dnswm.org](http://www.dnswm.org)

## **Assumptions:**

Ableism is everywhere.

All of us have learned the prevailing cultural messages about disability.

We have all said and done things that oppress and hurt people with disabilities.

Our beliefs about disability are often hidden ***even from our own selves***. When we pay close attention, we can discover those ableist thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

Recognizing and resisting ableism is a lifetime journey.

We are here because we want to learn and unlearn.

Hearing that what we currently do, think, believe or practice is hurtful, harmful or oppressive to people with disabilities can cause feelings of denial and defensiveness and close us off to listening deeply.

We are here because we know we have things to learn and unlearn, just as we have things to teach and model and share from our own journeys.

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## **Cautions:**

Segregated services are not equal

Being present is not the same as being included

Be careful about who gets the blame when inclusion 'doesn't work'

Inclusion is not a program, a service or a place

Beware of "special friend" and "buddy" programs

Inclusion is not fitting a person with a disability into the existing culture/structure/ways of doing things. We will all have to learn new behaviors and design new ways of doing things, together. This change is hard for those of us without disabilities; we may need to let go of some beloved practices or habits.

Parents of children/adults with disabilities can act as allies to their children; be careful not to mistake the views and perspectives of parents as being the same as the perspective of self –advocates or the disability rights movement.

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