

# What's In? What's Out? Changes in Disability Language

Leadership Development Training  
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# Words With Changed Meaning

# Evolution of Disability Language

- A Disability Diagnosis
  - Medical diagnosis
- Results in a label
  - Double-edged sword
  - Negative implications
- Neutral words
  - Have evolved to slurs

# Person-First Language

- Emphasizes the person first and then the disability
- Disability is an accessory versus an identify – what the person has rather than who the person is

# Identify-First Language

- Emphasizes the disability first and then the person
- Disability is an identifier versus an accessory – who the person is versus what the person has
- Most often used in Deaf, Blind, and Autistic communities

# Person-First v. Identity-First Language

Person  
with  
autism



Autistic  
person



# “Special Needs”

What about the term “special needs?”

Ordinary Needs Video

New York Times Article

Do Our Words Really Matter?



# Why Disability Words Matter

- Perceptions and attitudes reside in our heads.
- What's in our heads come out of our mouths.
- What comes out of our mouths reflects what we believe.
- What we believe drives our behavior (how we treat people).

# Language Considerations

- Getting rid of words that:
  - Presume incompetence (idiot, moron, imbecile)
  - Suggest inferiority (“them” or “those people” that suggests they are second-class citizens and leads to marginalization)
  - Evoke pity (victim, tragedy)
  - Create invisible barriers (suffers from, confined to)
- Using words that show dignity and respect
- Using words that promote equality

# Who Decides?

Person-Preferred Language

Community-First Language

Conscious Language