Sony Interactive Entertainment: ABLE Group Inclusive Language Guide

Inclusive language is language that "acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities." (LSA[1]) This Inclusive Language Guide was developed to help SIE employees understand the most misunderstood and most misused words and behavior in the workplace that can cause harm. We want to share this with others to educate and raise awareness to help workplaces be more inclusive and respectful for all employees.

Sections:
- General guidelines
- Etiquette
- Definitions
- Respectful and harmful phrases or terms
- Ways to be an ally
- Benefits to the business
- Additional resources (etiquette, ableist language examples, more phrases)

Video: "How You See Me: Disability" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwW6mYdJ7Xc)

General Guidelines
People with disabilities are individuals with individual lived experiences and will choose how they identify themselves individually. It's important to understand that while this is a general guideline, each person will have their own preference. Catch-all phrases such as "the blind," "the deaf" or "the disabled," do not reflect the individuality, equality or dignity of people with disabilities.

"Every individual is unique, but there is one thing we all have in common: we all want to be treated with respect. To the best of our own unique abilities, we have families, friends, communities, and lives that are just as fulfilling as anyone else. We may be different, but we are not less." (As stated by the National Association of the Deaf)

- When speaking to or about a person with a disability, it is important to focus on the person and not on their disability.
- Not all persons with disabilities will have strong preferences about language, and there is not always consistency about preferred language between different people.
- An effective way to determine a person's preferences for what language they are comfortable with is to ask them in a discrete way that does not draw additional attention to them.
- Some people may be more comfortable sharing information about their disabilities than others.
- Be sensitive in your use of language to the fact that chronic conditions and disabilities, including mental illness, are both visible and non-visible.

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1. https://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/guidelines-inclusive-language

- If a person has one disability, it does not mean they have another. For example, if a person has difficulty speaking, it doesn't mean they also have an intellectual or developmental disability.
- Many employees with disabilities are physically and mentally healthy.

This guide will provide alternative language to advise from using terms such as physically challenged, handi-capable, inconvenienced, or differently-abled and instead refer to a person who has a physical, sensory or mental disability more respectfully.

To some people, these euphemisms avoid reality and rob people of human dignity. Alternative words to the term "disability" are usually efforts to avoid the negative stigma attached to the word rather than seeing disability as neutral.

A person can be born with a disability (congenital) or they may acquire a disability through age, illness or accident. Furthermore, a disability can be visible (e.g. use of a wheelchair due to spinal cord injury) or non-apparent (e.g. mental illness) or occur only periodically (e.g. seasonal PTSD, Seasonal Affective Disorder) or where symptoms can occur suddenly and unexpectedly (e.g. chronic illness).

Etiquette

Think before you speak
Always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to their companion, aid or sign language interpreter. Making small talk with a person who has a disability is great; just talk to them as you would with anyone else. Respect their privacy. If you ask about their disability, they may feel like you are treating them as a disability, not as a human being. However, many people with disabilities are comfortable with questions about their disability after getting to know someone. A simple "I don't feel comfortable sharing that" by the person with a disability can set the tone if it is not something that they are willing to share.

Avoid assumptions
People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. Don't make decisions for them about participating in any activity.

Respond graciously to requests
When people who have disabilities ask for an accommodation at your business, it is not a complaint. It shows that they feel comfortable enough in your establishment to ask for what they need. If they get a positive response, they will most likely come back again and tell their friends about the good service they received.

General Do's and Don'ts
- Relax and enjoy getting to know your colleagues or guests as people and as professionals
- Ask before you provide assistance

- Do not assume that a person with an apparent disability needs assistance; offering assistance in broad terms such as "let me know if you need anything" opens the door without assumptions of inability
- Think in terms of 'Disability Pride' language using powerful words such as: wheelchair user as opposed to confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair bound person; person who is deaf or blind rather than deaf or blind people

Individuals with Mobility Disabilities
- Do not touch a person's mobility equipment
- Be sensitive about physical contact in consideration of possible pain, balance, or post-traumatic stress issues
- Always direct your conversation that is meant for the person with a disability to them and not to their personal assistant, interpreter, companion or colleague
- If convenient and natural, put yourself at the person's eye level when engaging in a conversation; rather than kneeling, consider pulling up a chair

Individuals who are Blind or Low Vision
- Identify yourself when approaching the person or entering an ongoing conversation; announce when you leave the conversation or the room
- When serving as a sighted guide, offer your arm or shoulder rather than grabbing the person's arm or pushing the person from the back
- Describe the setting, environment, and obstacles when serving as a sighted guide
- Do not pet or talk to a guide or service animal; ask the person if there is a time when you can interact with the service animal
- Offer to read the information if the occasion naturally arises such as during a roundtable or a meal

Individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- Gain the person's attention before starting a conversation (e.g., tap the person gently on the shoulder or arm or by a hand signal)
- If the individual uses a sign language interpreter, speak directly to the person, not the interpreter; keep your eyes on the individual and not on the interpreter, especially when the interpreter is voicing for the person who is deaf
- Face the person, speak in normal tones, and avoid the instinct to shout as it doesn't help

Individuals who have Speech Disabilities
- If you do not understand what the person is saying, ask the person to repeat what they said and then repeat it back to ensure you understood
- Do not speak for the person or attempt to finish their sentences, have patience and wait for them to finish.
- If the conversation is not working, explain that and ask if you can try with writing (e.g. electronic communication devices, paper and pencil, etc.)

Individuals who have Non-Apparent Disabilities

If you sense that the conversation or interaction is not going well, the following strategies may help to accommodate non-apparent disabilities such as mental health disabilities, learning disabilities, autism spectrum, mild hearing loss, ADD/ADHD, and Post Traumatic Stress:
- Move to a quiet area
- Rephrase what you said
- Change the pace of the conversation

You can find more information here: https://disabilityin.org/resource/disability-etiquette/

Definitions

Ableism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in physical, mental and/or emotional ability that contribute to a system of oppression; usually of able-bodied/minded persons against people with illness, disabilities or less developed skills.

Accessibility: The extent to which a facility is readily approachable and usable by individuals with disabilities.

Blind/legally blind/limited vision/low vision/partially sighted/visually impaired: Use "blind" only when the person has complete loss of sight and "legally blind" when the person has almost complete loss of sight. Other terms also may be acceptable. It is best to ask the person which term they prefer. Commonly used terms include:
- Limited vision: Acceptable when a person is not legally or completely blind
- Low vision: Acceptable when a person is not legally or completely blind
- Partially sighted: Used most often in British publications but acceptable if a person is not legally or completely blind
- Visually impaired: Similar to the term "hearing impaired," some may object to it because it describes the condition in terms of a deficiency.

deaf or Deaf: Use the lowercase deaf when referring to the audiological condition of not hearing, and the uppercase Deaf when referring to a particular group of deaf people who share a language – American Sign Language (ASL) – and a culture. The members of this group have inherited their sign language, use it as a primary means of communication among themselves, and hold a set of beliefs about themselves and their connection to the larger society. We distinguish them from, for example, those who find themselves losing their hearing because of illness, trauma or age; although these people share the condition of not hearing, they do not have access to the knowledge, beliefs, and practices that make up the culture of Deaf people. Nearly all organizations of the deaf use the term "deaf and hard of hearing."

Disability: People who have a mental or physical impairment which has a long-term effect on their ability to carry out day-to-day activities. What is the politically correct term for disabled? "Person with a Disability" is a more inclusive, less biased term to describe someone who is disabled.

Hard of hearing: a person with a mild-to-moderate hearing loss. Or it can denote a deaf person who doesn't have/want any cultural affiliation with the Deaf community. Or both. "Hearing-impaired" was a well-meaning term that is not accepted or used by many deaf and hard of hearing people. For many people, the words "deaf" and "hard of hearing" are not negative. Instead, the term "hearing-impaired" is viewed as negative. The term focuses on what people can't do. It establishes the standard as "hearing" and anything different as "impaired," or substandard, hindered, or damaged. It implies that something is not as it should be and ought to be fixed if possible.

Intersectionality: The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as disabilities, race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Mental Health Condition/Psychological Condition: Health conditions involving changes in mental, emotion, thinking or behavior (or a combination of these). The causes are not always known, but a number of factors are thought to influence their development: chemical imbalances in the brain, childhood experiences, heredity, illnesses, prenatal exposures, and stress.

Neurodiversity: A term that began as a way to describe people on the Autistic spectrum. Neurodiversity has since broadened to include people with:
- Autism
- Dyslexia
- ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Order)
- Dyscalculia
- DSD (Dyspraxia)
- Dysgraphia
- Tourette Syndrome
- and other neurological differences

Neurotypical: Often abbreviated as NT, it means to have a style of neurocognitive functioning that falls within the dominant societal standards of "normal." Neurotypical can be used as either an adjective ("They're neurotypical").

Respectful and harmful phrases or terms

People with disabilities are people first. When referring to an individual with a disability, it is important to identify them as:

- a person with a disability, not a disabled person
- More appropriate to say the person "has" that disability instead of saying they "are" disabled.

- A person on the autism spectrum or a person experiencing autism, not autistic or an autistic person. This varies by person and is a personal choice.

The "people first" mentality should also be applied when discussing mental illness.
- Identify as a person living with a mental illness, rather than a mentally ill person.
- Use the term accessible rather than disabled or handicapped to refer to facilities.
- Avoid outdated, offensive words such as handicapped, retarded, crazy, etc.
- Avoid using self-diagnosing language such as, "I'm OCD," and "I'm having an anxiety attack right now," unless these mental illnesses have been diagnosed.

It's okay to use idiomatic expressions when talking to people with disabilities. For example, saying, "It was good to see you," and "See you later," to a person who is blind is completely acceptable; they use these expressions themselves some of the time.

Not appropriate: Afflicted by mental illness, suffers from mental illness or is a victim of mental illness, mentally ill person, mental handicap
More appropriate: Living with a mental illness, person with a mental illness, intellectual disability

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Less appropriate: Special needs
More appropriate: Functional diversity, neurodiversity, person with a disability
Term is patronizing and distancing by those with disabilities. Often used by programs providing services and support for disabled people and meant as a 'positive' alternative. Describes that which is different about ANY person as all simply have "needs."

Not appropriate: (the) disabled, (the) deaf, (the) blind, (the) mentally retarded, the handicapped
More appropriate: people with disabilities, deaf people, blind people, persons with a developmental disability

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Less Appropriate: Bob is afflicted with, – stricken with, – suffers from, – a victim of polio, – spinal cord injury, – AIDS
More Appropriate: Bob has polio, – has a spinal cord injury, – has AIDS
Terms reflect negative and tragedy and connote pitiful helplessness, dependency, defeat. Denies other aspects of the person. Emphasizes the "heart string" or telethon-ish perspective.

Less Appropriate: confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound, wheel-chaired
More Appropriate: wheelchair user, uses a wheelchair, wheelchair using
Terms create a false impression: wheelchairs liberate, not confine or bind; they are mobility tools from which people transfer to sleep, sit in other chairs, drive cars, stand, etc.

Less Appropriate: Anita is crippled, – a cripple; That guy's a crip
More Appropriate: Anita has a physical disability; Tom is unable to walk
Cripple is an epithet generally offensive to people with physical disabilities. A second meaning of this adjective is "inferior."

Less Appropriate: Sue is an arthritic, – diabetic, – paraplegic.
More Appropriate: Sue has arthritis, – diabetes, – paralyzed, – has paralysis in her legs
Terms are variations of the condition and describes someone as the condition and implies the person is an object of medical care. Emphasizes the medical aspects of a condition instead of the person. Person is secondary to disability.

Not appropriate: Midget
More appropriate: Little people/person, person of short stature
Less Appropriate: sightless, blind as a bat, four eyes
More Appropriate: blind, legally blind, partially sighted
Terms are inaccurate, demeaning. Used as a put-down in most cases.

Less Appropriate: deaf and dumb, deaf-mute, dummy
More Appropriate: Deaf, Hard-of-Hearing
Terms implies mental incapacitation occurs with hearing loss and/or speech impairment.

Less Appropriate: lame, paralytic, gimp, gimpy
More Appropriate: walks with a cane, uses crutches
Terms are demeaning and outdated.

Less Appropriate: crazy, insane, psycho, nut, maniac, former mental patient
More Appropriate: mental disability, behavior disorder, emotional disability, person with a psychiatric disability
Terms are outdated and stigmatizing. Not all people who have had a mental or emotional disability have it forever or to the same degree all the time.

Less Appropriate: retard, slow, simple-minded, idiot
More Appropriate: people who are developmentally disabled
Terms are demeaning. Used as a put-down in most cases.

Less Appropriate: Sam is epileptic, Tony is CP (cerebral palsied),- spastic, Helen is LD (learning disabled), – is AD/HD
More Appropriate: Sam has epilepsy, Tony has cerebral palsy (CP), Helen has a learning disability, – attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder
These phrases describe people as their disabilities. Inaccurate reference; a person is NOT a condition.

Less appropriate: Addict
More appropriate: Person who is in recovery from a substance abuse disorder

Not appropriate: Dumb, mute
More appropriate: Person who is unable to speak

Not appropriate: Slow learner
More appropriate: Has a learning disability

Not appropriate: Brain damaged
More appropriate: Has a brain injury; traumatic brain injury (TBI)

Not appropriate: Birth defect
More appropriate: Congenital disability

Not appropriate: Burn victim, AIDS victim
More appropriate: Burn survivor, person with AIDS

Less appropriate: Seeing eye dog
More appropriate: Service animal

Less appropriate: Handicapped parking, disabled restroom
More appropriate: Accessible parking, accessible restroom

Less Appropriate: inspirational, courageous
More Appropriate: acknowledge the person's abilities and individuality
People with disabilities are not collectively inspirational or courageous. They are individuals who can do some things and can't do other things. Disability itself does not create a "strong" person, that strength comes from within the person.

Less Appropriate: "isn't it wonderful how they have overcome their disability?"
More Appropriate: accept people for who they are, including that they have a disability
Comment: People LIVE with a disability, they have to overcome attitudinal, social, architectural, educational, transportation and employment barriers. If you want to learn more, watch this TED Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/
stella_young_i_m_not_your_inspiration_thank_you_very_much/transcript?language=en