

## **Step Up & Shed the Labels!!!**

### **Communicating in People First Language**

What do we call *them*? How do I say it? These are 2 of the most popular questions I receive from coworkers in passing as well as in feedback from staff trainings regarding persons with disabilities. While recognizing we all want to “say the right thing” when describing or interacting with customers and coworkers with disabilities, the general rule of thumb is to always approach the interaction with good manners and a respectful attitude...much as you would *any other* customer.

One of the greatest challenges for persons with disabilities is not their disability, but overcoming attitudinal barriers which can potentially devalue any individual. The words we use to describe other human beings often conjure up both positive and negative images and sometimes inadvertently cause us to stereotype others. So first and foremost, start by avoiding the trap of labeling your fellow human beings, regardless of whether or not they have a disability. For example, we routinely phrase kids in summer camps as a “problem” when in reality many kids need behavior “supports.” When trying to meet the needs of a person, use language that values all and reflects an “inclusive” approach to meeting those needs. Remember, the only difference for customers with disabilities and customers without disabilities is how a body part works, how one learns, or how one communicates. Bottom line...*them* is us!!!!

Listed below are some general communication tips you can not only use in your daily interactions with customers with disabilities, but also in how you view all customers.

<b><i>Cool:</i></b>	<b><i>Uncool:</i></b>
People or persons with disabilities.....	The handicapped; disabled; impaired
Nick has an intellectual disability.....	He is mentally retarded; Has a developmental disability
Junior has autism.....	Junior’s autistic
Teddy has a diagnosis of down syndrome.....	He’s a down’s kid; he’s a mongoloid
He has a physical disability.....	He’s crippled; a gimp; a quad
Accessible (restroom/parking).....	Handicapped (facilities/parking)
Person who is deaf .....	Deaf person
Hard of hearing.....	Hearing impaired
Kids without disabilities.....	Normal kids
Mary has a congenital disability.....	Birth defect
Al has a traumatic brain injury.....	Al has brain damage
Patty needs/uses/requires.....	Has problem with; has special needs
Bob uses a wheelchair/mobility device.....	is wheelchair bound; confined to....
Lizza receives inclusion services.....	is an inclusion kid
Bob is of short stature.....	vertically challenged; dwarf; midget
Betty has a mental health condition.....	mentally ill
Frank has an emotional disability.....	Frank is emotionally disturbed