



Using the Right Language When Talking About Autism

Overview

Learning Objectives:

After reading this powerpoint, you should be able to

- Define person and condition first language
- Describe current preferred trends
- Detail preferred language

Person-First Language

vs.

Condition First Language

- “A person with autism”
- An individual is a person before their condition
- Was the go-to terminology since 1970

- “Autistic individual”
- Reflection of their pride in being autistic
- Autism is a part of them, not something that affects them
- Emerging as a preferred choice

Which Terms to Use with Autism

- There is no consensus on preferred autism terminology
- Editors may mix using person first and condition/identity first language in writing
- If someone is writing an article *about* people with autism, the current trend is to ask them how they would like to be identified

Autism Activists

- Go against organizations that seek to promote cures for autistic people
- They call for autistic people and their allies to join in celebrating the unique possibilities inherent in being different
- Autism activists advocate for supporting the unique skill sets of autistic individuals such as
 - Deep focus, hypervigilance, and exceptional observational skills

Terms/Practices to Stray Away From

- **“Special” education**
- **Asperger’s Syndrome**- Asperger’s is not considered a medical diagnosis
- **High functioning**- The idea of autism as a spectrum condition is more descriptive and doesn’t create a hierarchy of levels of function
- **Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA)**- A practice that favors cure over acceptance

Final Takeaways

- Try your hand at **words that reflect being different but not defective.**
- Right now, the terms neurodiverse and neuro-differences are popular.
- It's perfectly reasonable to give voice to your concerns about what to say and when.
- **Autistic individuals can help you find your way – don't be afraid to ask!**



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