Leeds Language College

Disability Awareness

Always treat disabled students with equality and do not exclude them from any class activities or school trips, even if they can only participate to a limited degree. Make reason adjustments where necessary. We are all pretty good at treating people equally at LLC but just in case you are not sure what is appropriate to say when working in a mixed ability environment here are some current notes on avoidable and acceptable terms. (It might be an idea to address both sets of vocabulary in lessons describing people when considering positive and negative adjectives! BUT be aware and sensitive to the issues.)

Language

Political correctness: the language of sensitivity or a hindrance?

Non-disabled people can feel intimidated about how to address disabled people for fear of saying the wrong thing.

Some tips on language

- Use a normal tone of voice, do not patronise or talk down.
- Do not define a disabled person by their impairment. It causes offence to be given a medical label.
- Don't be too precious or too politically correct - being super sensitive to the right and wrong language and depictions will stop you doing anything.
- Take care to ensure that language used does not reinforce a negative stereotype.
- Avoid labels that say nothing about the person and reinforce the impression that the disabled person is sick or dependent.
- Avoid references that dehumanise, use instead a 'person with…' Never say 'a victim of' or 'suffers from'. Avoid collective nouns, such as 'the disabled'. One exception is that many deaf people whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL) consider themselves part of "the deaf community." They may describe themselves as "Deaf", with a capital D, to emphasise their deaf identity.
- It is acceptable to use everyday language, for example, 'see you later', 'another pair of hands'.
- Never attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to.
- Address disabled people in the same way as you talk to everyone else.
- Communicate directly to a disabled person, even if accompanied by an interpreter or companion.
- Ensure the disabled person has a role equal to that of everyone else.

Word list

This page highlights preferred words and phrases to use when talking to disabled people or talking about disability.

Avoid	Use instead
'The disabled' - Use of this collective noun implies that all disabled people have the same needs and issues, and reinforces their perceived separateness from the rest of society.	'Disabled people'
'The deaf'	'Deaf people/hard of hearing people' (depending on which group) or 'hearing impaired'
'Deaf and dumb' or 'deaf mute'	'A person who is deaf without speech' or 'deaf sign language (or British Sign Language) user'. BSL is a recognised language and for many deaf people it will be their first language
'The blind'	'Blind people' or 'partially sighted people' (depending on which group), or 'visually impaired'
'Able bodied, healthy, normal'	'Non-disabled'
'People with disabilities' - The 'Social Model' of disability regards people as having an impairment, but being 'disabled' by society's attitudes and actions	'Disabled people' or 'people with impairments'
'Handicapped, cripple, invalid'	'Disabled' or 'disabled people/person', or if appropriate, a 'person with a mobility impairment'
'Victim of or suffering from'	'Has (an impairment)', 'a person with' and avoid using medical labels which define people by their disability
'Wheelchair bound' or 'confined to a wheelchair'	'Wheelchair user' or 'a person who uses a wheelchair'
'An epileptic'	'A person with epilepsy'
'A spastic'	'A person with cerebral palsy'
'Mental handicap'	'A person with learning disabilities / learning difficulties'
'Retarded'	'A person with learning disabilities / learning difficulties'
'Dwarf' or 'midget'	'Restricted growth' or 'short stature'
'Fits, spells, attacks'	'Seizures'