

Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities

Words Matter: Person-Centered Language

Person-Centered Thinking & Planning Tip Sheet for Foster Care in New York

What does it mean to be person-centered?

Being person-centered is about how you look at the world. This perspective considers the young person as an active participant in their own life choices. It is seeing the person's strengths first, instead of their disabilities, deficits, or things that other may think need to be "cured."

Scan this with your smartphone for resources, examples, and more information on this topic!



Children, Youth, and Young Adults

As youth get older, it's important to begin recognizing their transition toward adulthood. Young people in foster care are often referred to in paperwork and in meetings as "children." As we move toward supporting young people to learn their rights and take more responsibility in their lives, the words used to describe them should also change. Instead of calling them kids or children, consider, "Youth," "Young Person" or "Young Adult," and consider making similar changes to forms that use only "child," to say "Child/Youth/Young Adult."

Disabilities: Person-First Language and Identity-First Language

As a part of the disability rights movement, there has been a shift in the way that some people use language to describe themselves and others with disabilities. Instead of using the word "disabled" or "handicapped" to describe someone, many prefer person-first language which prioritizes the person before the disability.

Be curious and ask the person how they prefer to have their disability described.

Examples

Suggested Person-First Description	Avoid This Description
Person with a disability	Disabled, handicapped
Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined, restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound
Person with an intellectual disability	Retarded, slow, special person, disabled person
Person with an emotional disability	Insane, crazy
Person with cerebral palsy	CP afflicted, victim

Note that the shift to person-first language is not universal. There are some groups who see their disability as so integral to their life and experiences that they prefer descriptors such as "autistic" or "disabled." This is known as "identity-first language."



Developed by Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities at the University of Rochester, a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, in partnership with the Institute for Innovative Transition and the Westchester Institute for Human Development. Funded by the NYS Developmental Disabilities Planning Council. Thank you to many statewide stakeholders who contributed to this project and support youth in foster care every day!



UNIVERSITY of
ROCHESTER
MEDICAL CENTER