

# PEOPLE MATTER, WORDS MATTER™

## ARE YOU USING **CARING AND COMPASSIONATE LANGUAGE** ABOUT PEOPLE WITH **DISABILITIES**?

Language evolves, adapting to shifts in social norms and perceptions. Humility and curiosity foster opportunities for inclusivity. Language matters in compassionate health care and is not limited to what we say in front of patients and families.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 4 adults and 1 in 6 children aged 3-17 in the United States have some type of disability that may affect their vision, movement, thinking, remembering, learning, communicating, hearing, mental health, and/or social relationships (CDC, 2023).

People with disabilities are not a homogenous group, and therefore our language should support the diversity of disability communities.

### INSTEAD OF SAYING...

- ▶ You're so strong/courageous/brave, I could never [be blind, use a wheelchair, etc.].!
- ▶ It's so inspiring that you ...
- ▶ You don't act/look disabled.
- ▶ They have special needs/they are differently abled.
- ▶ Suffering from a disability, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound.
- ▶ Lame, retarded, handicapped, crippled, insane.
- ▶ Anything that implies that an individual with a disability also has an intellectual disability.

[ THESE STATEMENTS PERPETUATE  
STIGMA AND INVALIDATE A  
PERSON'S EXPERIENCE ]

### CONSIDER SAYING ...

- Nothing. Don't say anything unless you would say the same thing to someone who doesn't have a disability.
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- Nothing. Just because you can't see their disability doesn't make it any less real.
- Use the word "disability." By choosing language that doesn't include disability, we perpetuate stigma about the word.
- Don't use phrases that assume a negative experience.
- Don't use words that are demeaning.
- Speak directly to the person with the disability, not to their companion or support person. Avoid talking at a louder tone or at a slower pace unless someone has requested this.

[ THESE STATEMENTS SHOW COMPASSION,  
RESPECT AND CONSIDERATION FOR A  
PERSON'S UNIQUE EXPERIENCES. ]

Thank you to Gillette Children's for being a source of information and talking points on this topic.