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## Introduction

Although Triangle, Inc. has acknowledged that there are challenges and injustices across boundaries such as race, gender, and sexual orientation, a lot more needs to be done on disability as part of our ongoing DEI efforts. As a response, the Disability Justice Task Force (DJTF) was formed to address injustices and inequalities brought about by ableism.

One of the foundational initiatives of the DJTF is to produce a shared language manual to ensure the use of language that is inclusive and promotes dignity. Triangle has a diverse workforce with different educational backgrounds, ethnicities, nationalities, personalities, values, cultural beliefs, and language proficiencies. These differences can and have created significant barriers to effective communication and the achievement of a common goal. Triangle has taken notice and is at the forefront of promoting, most importantly, mindful language amongst its workforce, as well as the people it serves. Disability is part of the human experience, but sometimes people use words or phrases that are insensitive and do not promote understanding, dignity, and respect for people with disabilities. Most often, this is not intentional but still creates negative impacts.



Shared language refers to people developing understanding amongst themselves based on language (e.g., spoken or text) to help them communicate more effectively. Speaking the same language denotes oneness, elicits a level of comfort and inclusiveness, and speaks to the shared identity and values of a social group. Shared language can be jargon, vocabulary, technical terms, acronyms, colloquialisms, and words that have specific meanings in a particular context.

The purpose of Triangle, Inc.'s Shared Language Guide is to:

- Push for continuous learning and growth.
- Promote a culture of inclusiveness and dignity for people with disabilities in Triangle's operations.
- Improve mutual understanding and effective communication.
- Strengthen our workforce's sense of identity, belonging, and shared purpose.
- Solidify Triangle's commitment to DEI efforts.

This guide will serve as a reference point for words and/or phrases regarding human services and how we use them at Triangle. It includes preferred and dignifying words to describe people or situations and definitions of common words/phrases. It contains a summarized and extended version.

# Disability Language: Use This, Not That

Topic	Terms to Use 	Terms to NOT Use 	Reason
Disabilities in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disability</li> <li>Disabled</li> <li>Person with a Disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special needs</li> <li>Differently abled</li> <li>Handicapped</li> </ul>	The Disability Community has stated that the correct terms to use when referring to the community are Disabled or Disability. Other terms were created by those without disabilities and these terms perpetuate ableism.
Terms for younger participants at Triangle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth</li> <li>Young Adults</li> <li>Teens</li> <li>Students</li> <li>Transition-Aged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kids</li> <li>Children</li> </ul>	Triangle, Inc. does not currently provide services for children or kids. Triangle provides services for teenagers and older. It is important that we do not refer to the young people served as children/kids due to a long history of ableism that infantilizes people with disabilities.
Physical Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical Disability</li> <li>Physically Disabled</li> <li>Specific Disability (ie. Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida)</li> <li>Wheelchair user</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wheelchair bound</li> <li>Crippled</li> <li>Handicapped</li> </ul>	Many terms are rooted in an oppressive history. It is important that you are using terms that do not perpetuate negative undertones of disability.
People without Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People without disabilities</li> <li>Nondisabled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Normal</li> <li>Able-bodied</li> <li>Typical</li> </ul>	These terms can imply that there is only one way to be “normal” or “able-bodied,” and that anyone who deviates from this norm is somehow inferior, and can be hurtful and alienating to people with disabilities
Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intellectual Disability</li> <li>Developmental Disability</li> <li>Specific Disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentally challenged</li> <li>Special needs</li> <li>Mentally retarded</li> </ul>	These terms are seen as derogatory and outdated. They are associated with infantilizing and paternalistic of people with disabilities.
Slang words that are rooted in ableism	You should replace the words listed with a term that better states what you are trying to say.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crazy</li> <li>Lame</li> <li>Manic</li> </ul>	These words have demoralizing historical associations for people physically disabled, or neurodivergent.
Referring to an individual’s abilities or support needs	Share specific support needs, learning styles, accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High functioning</li> <li>Low functioning</li> </ul>	These terms are seen as stigmatizing, inaccurate and subjective. They are not used by the Autistic Community.

# Language and Identity

This guide was created in collaboration with the members of the Triangle, Inc.'s Disability Justice Task Force. Language is a living, evolving device of communication, and it is constantly changing. The language in this guide is based on the current understanding of what is appropriate and preferred by the greater Disability community. Different groups within the Disability community may have their preferred language, and each individual person will have the language they are comfortable with and use. Our mission is not to correct the language of a group or individual, but instead to create a guide for staff.

**Please respect the preferred language of the people you work with and encounter daily, only correcting if their language is especially grievous or harmful to others based on race, religion, nationality, disability, sexuality, gender, etc.**

## Person First Language vs. Identity First Language

**Person First Language** puts the person before the disability.

*Examples:*

- *A person with a disability*
- *A person with an intellectual disability*

**Identity First Language** puts the person's Disability Identity first.

*Examples:*

- *A disabled person*
- *An autistic person*

### Which one should I use?

At first, you should use whatever language you feel most comfortable using. Both Person First and Identity First Language are acceptable. Once you know how a person self-identifies, you should use the language they use to self-identify.

## Models of Disability

### Medical Model vs. Social Model of Disability

The medical model and the social model are two different ways of understanding the experience of disability.

- **Medical Model of Disability:** The medical model focuses on the individual's impairment or difference and seeks to fix it through medical or other interventions. The medical model can be helpful in providing medical care and support. It can also lead to people with disabilities being seen as "patients" and "clients," and their needs being defined by professionals, as opposed to being driven by person-centered goals.
- **Social Model of Disability:** The social model focuses on the barriers that people with disabilities face in their everyday lives, and seeks to remove these barriers. The social model can be helpful in raising awareness about inaccessible buildings, lack of transportation, negative societal attitudes, and advocating for change. The social model of disability is gaining acceptance in recent years. It is seen as a more empowering and inclusive way of understanding disability, and it has led to changes in the way that disability is viewed and treated by society.

# Disability and Disability Justice Terms & Definitions

Terms are listed in alphabetical order.

<b>Ableism</b>	A system of advantage and discrimination based on ability or perceived ability. Prejudice and/or discrimination against people with mental and/or physical disabilities.
<b>Accessible/Accessibility</b>	Refers to all aspects which influence a person's ability to function within an environment or the measure of how simply a person can participate in an activity. Accessibility categories are Architectural, Programmatic, Technology, Communications, and Alternate Formats.
<b>Accommodation</b>	Accommodations are any device, technology, service, or change in programs, policies, or the built environment that enable individuals with disabilities to perform essential functions of a job or to participate in events and programs equally.
<b>Assistive Technology</b>	Assistive technology is any item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities.
<b>Autism/Autistic</b>	Autism is known as a "spectrum" disorder because there is wide variation in the type and severity of symptoms people experience. Autism spectrum disorders describe a range of neurodevelopmental disorders that significantly impact communication and social skills and can be evidenced by restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. The definition of autism spectrum disorders is evolving and is seen differently depending on who is explaining it. The federal definition used for special education states that autism spectrum disorder is a developmental disability that significantly affects verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as social interaction. Autism spectrum disorders are usually diagnosed by age three; however, many individuals go undiagnosed until later in life.
<b>Blind</b>	Partial or "legal" visual impairment is based on standard vision being defined as 20/20 visual acuity and an average range of 180 degrees in peripheral vision. People are defined as being legally blind if, after methods of correction such as glasses or contact lenses, they have a visual acuity of 20/200 or higher, or a range of peripheral vision under 20 degrees.
<b>Community-Based Day Services</b>	Supports and services that lead to the acquisition, improvement and retention of skills and abilities that prepare individuals for work and community participation. The services are provided in accordance with the individual's ISP and include career exploration activities that are predominantly job task oriented, community integration experiences, development of skills in activities of daily living, and the pursuit of personal interests and hobbies.

# Disability and Disability Justice Terms & Definitions

Terms are listed in alphabetical order.

<b>Deaf/Hard of Hearing</b>	A total or partial inability to hear, which can be genetic or acquired through disease, most commonly from meningitis in childhood or rubella in women during pregnancy.
<b>Developmental Disability</b>	Developmental disability is a diverse group of chronic conditions, comprising mental or physical impairments. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning, and usually last throughout a person's lifetime. Examples include Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, and autism.
<b>Disability Justice</b>	Disability justice is a social justice movement that focuses on examining disability and ableism as they relate to other forms of oppression and identity, such as race, class, and gender.
<b>Discrimination</b>	Discrimination is an action or a decision that treats a person or a group badly for reasons such as their race, age, religion, sexuality, or disability.
<b>Dynamic Disability</b>	A dynamic disability is a disability that varies over time in terms of its intensity, symptoms, presentation, and impact on a person's life. This can be due to a variety of factors, such as the progression of a chronic illness, the effects of medication, the environment, and many more. People with dynamic disabilities may experience a range of symptoms that can vary from day to day, hour to hour, and so on. Many different types of disabilities can be considered dynamic, including, but are not limited to: arthritis multiple sclerosis, cancer, chronic pain, bipolar, autism, TBI, PTSD, CPTSD.
<b>Guardianship</b>	In Massachusetts, guardianship is a legal process that gives the guardian permission to take care of and make decisions for an incapacitated adult. An incapacitated person is someone with a clinically diagnosed condition that keeps them from being able to make or communicate decisions about their physical health, safety, or care. The person asking to be named guardian is called the petitioner, and the person believed to be incapacitated is called the respondent.
<b>Inclusion</b>	An environment and commitment to support, represent, and embrace diverse social groups and identities; an environment where all people feel they belong.
<b>Individual Support Plan (ISP)</b>	A written plan of services of supports for an individual, which is developed, implemented, reviewed, and modified according to the requirements of the Department for Developmental Services' (DDS) regulations on individual service plans.

# Disability and Disability Justice Terms & Definitions

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<b>Individualized Education Plan (IEP)</b>	The IEP is intended to be a useful document that helps educators and parents to understand the student and how best to work with that student. In other words, the IEP should describe how the student learns, how the student best demonstrates that learning and how the school staff and student will work together to help the student learn better.
<b>Informed Consent</b>	The knowing consent voluntarily given by an individual (or by the individual's guardian, if applicable) who can understand and weigh the risks and benefits involved in the particular decision or matter.
<b>Intellectual Disability</b>	Intellectual disability (or ID) is a term used when a person has certain limitations in cognitive functioning and skills, including conceptual, social, and practical skills, such as language, social, and self-care skills. These limitations can cause a person to develop and learn more slowly or differently than a typically developing person. Intellectual disability can happen any time before a person turns 22 years old, even before birth. Intellectual disability is the most common developmental disability.
<b>Internalized Ableism</b>	Internalized Ableism is when a disabled individual, consciously or unconsciously, absorbs ableist views and mindsets that impact how they see negatively themselves as a disabled person and how to view other people with disabilities.
<b>Intersectionality</b>	The concept of intersectionality describes the ways in which systems of inequality based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class, and other forms of discrimination intersect to create unique dynamics and effects.
<b>Invisible Disability</b>	Invisible disabilities are physical, mental, or neurological conditions that are not visible from the outside, yet can limit or challenge a person's movements, senses, or activities.
<b>Learning Disability</b>	Learning disabilities are caused by impairments in one or more of the cognitive processes associated with learning. A learning disability affects an individual's ability to acquire, retain, comprehend, and organize verbal and/or non-verbal information.
<b>Life Plan</b>	Began in 2018 and is being used in place of the ISP process for those served under Community Developmental Disability Supports (CDDS) in some parts of the Commonwealth. It is a meeting and series of forms that aim to create person-centered, individual-driven process that includes a global focus of the individual's goals and objectives in a way that is simple, comfortable, and respectful for the DDS eligible population of ASD/No ID adults.

# Disability and Disability Justice Terms & Definitions

Terms are listed in alphabetical order.

<b>Mental Health Disability</b>	A mental health disability is a mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity. There is not one agreed upon definition of a mental health impairment, but they can include psychological disorders and mental illnesses, such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, major depression, anxiety disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and personality disorders.
<b>Neurodivergent</b>	Neurodivergent is an umbrella term to describe an individual whose mind, or functioning diverges from dominant societal norms, standards or expectations including learning, processing, interpreting, feeling, behaving, communicating, and more, Neurodivergence can be acquired or genetic, a fundamental part of your identity or not. Neurodivergences include but are not limited to: ADHD, ASPD, DID, OSDD, BPD, NPD, Dyslexia, CPTSD, Dyspraxia, HSP, Sensory processing, PTSD, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, Bipolar, Autism, Epilepsy, GAD, OCD, ABI, TBI, Schizophrenia, Misophonia, HPD, Down Syndrome, FASD, Synesthesia, and more.
<b>Neurodiversity</b>	Neurodiversity refers to the diversity of human minds and all the unique and different ways that people can exist, think, act, process, feel and function. It is a fundamental truth that we are diverse in our minds just like we are diverse in our ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc.
<b>Neurotypical</b>	Neurotypical is a term to describe an individual whose functioning falls with dominant societal norms. Neurotypical is the opposite of neurodivergence. Both are neutral terms.
<b>Physical Disability</b>	Mobility and physical disabilities are usually defined by impairments, limitations, or characteristics that limit or prevent independent movement or full use of one or more body parts. Disabilities in this category may be congenital or the result of injury, aging, disease, or other reasons.
<b>Speech/Communication Disability</b>	The term communication disability, or communication disorder, covers a wide range of conditions that ultimately impact a person's ability to communicate with others. This includes people with a disability who communicate with the use of a communication aid or those who cannot understand or be understood by others at all. Communication disabilities can be linked to a range of conditions, and are not always standalone.