Overthrowing Ableism.

A family guide to the do's and don'ts.

A — Autonomy

Autonomy is having control of your own life. It is also the ability to choose for yourself. Ableism limits choice and control because people with disabilities are given less access and control. Access and control are also limited when people make assumptions about disability.

DON'T	Assume a disabled person needs your help.
DON'T	Call attention to your acts when you are asked for help.
DO	Ask if help is needed (and respect the answer you get).
DO	Keep your hands to yourself (it's never OK to touch someone or their mobility device without permission).

I — Inclusion

Inclusion is connected to autonomy. If people don't have access or if we assume they don't want to join us, they can't be included. Inclusion is more than having equal access. Inclusion means having equitable access.

DON'T	Assume people with disabilities won't want to join. Ask and find out!
DO	Ask if disabled guests need accommodations.
DO	Think about barriers that can prevent people with disabilities from being included. How can you change them?

D — Dignity

When people think of dignity, we often think of respect. People who are respected can access the places and things they need. We also talk to and about people we respect in a certain way.

DON'T	Use baby talk when talking to people with disabilities.
DO	Use a natural tone of voice.
DO	Speak directly to people with disabilities (instead of attendants or caregivers).
DO	Adjust your position if a disabled person is unable to see your face (ex, coming out from behind a counter or sitting next to a wheelchair user).

F Functioning Labels

Functioning labels can keep us from seeing a person's true strengths and needs. They can also be unreliable because our abilities change in different environments.

A better way to advocate is to describe strengths and needs. Here is a simple formula:

Person + Strength + Need

For example: "my son likes to be around other kids, but he needs help introducing himself." This model also helps you to protect your loved one's privacy because others only hear what they need to know.

DON'T   Use functioning labels (this includes "high-functioning," "low-functioning," "profound," or "severe."

DON'T   Overshare. Describe only what others need to know.

DO   Describe strengths *and* needs.

O Outdated and Offensive Langauage

Language is one way we share our thoughts with others. When we experience bias (such as ableism), it shows up in our language. Sometimes words and phrases that used to be OK become connected with ideas that are not so nice. One example of this is the "r-word." The r-word used to be a medical term that doctors used. Over time, its meaning changed to include people, things, or situations that were unlikable.

DON'T   Use outdated or offensive language

DO   Listen to how people with disabilities use language to describe themselves and respect individual preferences

E Euphemisms

We use euphemisms to describe people, things, or situations that are offensive or upsetting. For example, instead of saying that a person has died, many people will say, "he passed away." Instead of saying someone was fired from their job, some might say, "she was let go."

We also use euphemisms to describe disabled people. Some examples are:

- Differently abled
- Challenged
- Handi-capable
- Special needs

There are two problems with euphemisms. First, they can make it hard to think about needs. Second, they can make very real problems with autonomy, inclusion, and dignity seem like less of a big deal. Disabled, on the other hand, is a serious, legal term that demands respect.

DON'T   Use euphemisms when referring to people with disabilities - unless they specifically ask you to do so.

DO   Use the word "disabled."

Brief List of Preferred Language

General	Say This	Not This
	Person with a disability	Suffers from
	Disabled	Afflicted by
	Has a disability	Victim of
	Is disabled	See also, euphemisms
	Is able to...	High functioning
	Is unable to...	Low functioning
	Needs support to...	See also, functioning labels

Physical Disabilities	Say This	Not This
	Uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair-bound
	Uses a mobility device (cane, walker, etc.)	Confined to a wheelchair
	Person with a physical disability	Cripple / crippled by...
	Physically disabled	Invalid
	Person with [specific diagnosis]	Lame
		Spaz

Intellectual & Neurological Disabilities	Say This	Not This
	Person with an intellectual/ cognitive disability	Mentally challenged
	Intellectually/cognitively disabled person	Mentally handicapped
	Person with a learning disability	Mentally retarded
	Learning disabled person	Slow
	Person with [specific diagnosis]	Stupid
	Autistic (preferred by most)	
	Neurodivergent	
	Person with autism	

Mental Health	Say This	Not This
	Person with a mental health diagnosis/disability	Bonkers
	Person with a psychiatric diagnosis/disability	Crazy
	Person with [specific diagnosis]	Loony
		Manic
		Psycho/psychotic

Brief List of Preferred Langauge

Sensory Disabilities	Say This	Not This
	Deaf person Deaf-Blind person Person who is hard of hearing	Hearing impaired person Person who is hearing impaired Person with hearing loss Person with deafness (and blindness)
	Blind person Person who is blind Person with low/limited vision	Visually impaired Visually challenged Sight challenged Person with blindness

People without Disabilities	Say This	Not This
	Nondisabled Person without a disability Neurotypical	Normal Regular

More Resources for Preferred Language

American Psychological Association: Inclusive Language Guidelines
apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language

Emily Ladau: Demystifying Disability
emilyladau.com/book

Lydia X. Z. Brown (Autistic Hoya): Ableism/Langauage
www.autistichoya.com/p/ableist-words-and-terms-to-avoid.html

National Center on Disability in Journalism: Disability Language Style Guide
ncdj.org/style-guide