

## **Respectful Language & Identity Choice**

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It is the policy of The Arc of the Triangle (The Arc) that all employees and volunteers consistently use terms and descriptors which respect the wishes of all people in The Arc community, and refrain from using any language which can be considered degrading or separating when communicating about people who have disabilities and/or differences. When speaking with an individual, it is the policy of The Arc of the Triangle to use the person's preferred name and pronouns.

As we promote the growth and progress of people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities and their full integration in the community, we must set an example by respectfully speaking with and about others as "people" first and foremost. What we say and how we say it are equally important. Words can create helpful images or they can create stereotypes that become barriers. The following are guidelines to keep in mind when we are speaking to and/or speaking/writing about people who have intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

1. Employees and volunteers will set an example by respectfully thinking and speaking of participants as "people" first and foremost, in order to promote the growth and progress of people with disabilities, and specifically participants for whom The Arc provides supports or services, and their fuller integration in the community.
  - **Use people first language as a default, but ask what language or descriptors participants prefer.** (an example of person first language is, "a person with a developmental disability" but some people may want to be referred to in other ways).
  - **Do not focus on a person's disability,** but be truthful and honest. Do not sensationalize the person's accomplishments.
  - **Emphasize abilities, not limitations,** and capitalize on strengths to help reinforce success:
  - **Avoid excessive language which substitutes or diminishes the disability or is emotional.** For example, refrain from using terms like "special" "special needs" "high-functioning" or "unfortunate":
  - **Do not imply disease when discussing disabilities.** People with disabilities are not "patients" or "cases". Avoid terms like "stricken with" or "suffers from."
  - **Refer to people with disabilities as included and contributing members of society.**
  - **Refer to people with age-appropriate descriptors.** For example, do not refer to a twenty-year-old with a disability as a "kid".
  - **Always refer to people with their preferred pronouns.** Never assume pronouns and ask for them to share which pronouns they prefer. Some examples of pronouns are "he/him/his," "she/her/hers," and "they/them/theirs."



2. The following are some basic examples of words and phrases which should not be used by employees or volunteers of The Arc, and more enhancing ways to communicate the same concept:

**NEGATIVE**

"Client" or "Consumer"

"Mentally retarded"

"Schizophrenic"

"Wheelchair bound"

"Epileptic"

**POSITIVE**

Participant; Person receiving supports/services

Person who has an intellectual or developmental disability

Person who has schizophrenia

Person who uses a wheelchair

Person who has epilepsy/seizures

The Arc's employees and volunteers will model respectful language and are empowered to strongly discouraged the use of words like "mental retardation", "mentally retarded", "retard", or "retarded".

**Referring to The Arc:**

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- Always keep "The" and "Arc" together as a single name. We are "The Arc" not an "Arc". Our local chapter is "The Arc of the Triangle". Our state chapter is "The Arc of North Carolina". Always capitalize the "T" in "The Arc".
- NEVER capitalize "ARC" when referring to the organization.
- Never refer to the organization as "The ARC".

***Remember: it is not an acronym- it is the words "The Arc".***