“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and lightning-bug.” – Mark Twain

The key to language is basic. People with disabilities are human first and their disability second. To ensure inclusion, freedom, and respect for all it’s time to embrace person-first language.

People with disabilities are the largest minority group in the United States. It is the most inclusive and most diverse group: consisting of all ages, genders, religions, ethnicities, sexual orientations and socioeconomic levels. 1 out of 5 individuals have a disability in our country.

1 - Why does language matter?

- Equal rights do not guarantee people with disabilities equal treatment. Attitudes cannot be regulated by law.

- Words can be offensive and perpetuate negative stereotypes and attitudinal barriers.

- Words influence our actions. Negative words = Negative actions.

2 - What might people with disabilities have in common with one another?

- People are different, disability or not. The one thing people with disabilities usually have in common with one another is being on the receiving end of societal ignorance, prejudice, and discrimination.

- The only minority group any person can “join” at anytime – at birth, through an accident, illness, or the aging process.

3 – Do people with disabilities need fixed or does the environment and people’s attitudes?

- What is routinely called a “problem” actually reflects a need. Ex. A person who wears glasses doesn’t say “I have a problem seeing.” He/She says, “I wear (or need) glasses.”

- You don’t want to be known/described by your problems, but rather by the positive characteristics that make you the unique individual you are.

- The real problem is never the person’s disability but often the attitudes of others. A change in our attitude leads to changes in our actions. Attitudes drive actions.

Disability is a natural part of life. When people are defined by their gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, etc. we consider it discrimination.