L.I.F.E. Language

At L.I.F.E. we recognize the need to be aware of changing disability language. We recognize the power of language to demonstrate respect or offense and to empower individuals or disqualify them.

We also recognize the importance of how language is used to instruct, teach, praise, and communicate. It is not just what is said but how one says it that can make a profound difference to the progress of our consumers.

Thus, all employees at L.I.F.E. are taught to utilize specific language when referring to our consumers and when talking to our consumers. We have named this collection: L.I.F.E. Language.

L.I.F.E. Language includes:
- Person First Language
    - You Can Language
        - Do Language
        - Varying Praise
- Declarative Language

Person First Language
- Definition
    - Puts the person before the disability.
    - Does not define the person by their disability.
    - The disability is just one of many characteristics the person has such as hair color, a nice smile, great sense of humor etc.
- Examples:
    - We say "child with epilepsy" not "the epileptic child"
    - We say "client with cerebral palsy" not "the CP client"
    - We say "student with visual impairment" not "the blind student"

- Person First Language and Assistive Technology
    - An assistive technology (AT) device is something the person uses not something that defines them. We avoid the use of language that depicts using AT as something negative.
    - Examples:
        - We say "The student uses a wheelchair."
        - We say "We have 5 wheelchair users in this classroom."
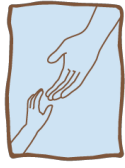
- Terms such as "wheelchair bound" or "confined to a wheelchair" are avoided.
- We say "The consumer uses a communication device."
- We say "The student communicates through facial expressions and eye gaze."
- Terms such as "can't talk" or "non-verbal" are avoided as they can devalue the person's communication.

NOTE: Although we don't utilize Identity First Language as a practice, we do educate our employees on this newer language type. Additionally, if requested by the consumer or family we will do our best to utilize this style of language in relation to the consumer.

You Can Language
- We inform consumers what they can do instead of frequently asking them what they can do.
- It implies confidence the client can follow the instruction.
- Avoids repetitive questions
- Avoids potential power struggle
- Examples:
  - We say "You can take a bite." instead of "Can you take a bite?"
  - We say "You can write your name." instead of "Can you write your name?"
  - We say "You can sit down in this seat." instead of "Can you sit in this chair?"

Do Language
- Helps the client understand the exact, correct behavior we expect.
- Tells the client the rule rather than saying "stop," "don't," or "no".
- Gives the client the appropriate behavior in specific terms.
- Examples:
  - We say "Food stays on the table." rather than "Stop throwing food."
  - We say "Chairs are for sitting." rather than "Sit down!"
  - We say "Think with your eyes" rather than "Look at me."
  - We say "Make your body be a part of the group." rather than "Turn around."
  - We say "That's unexpected." rather than "Don't shout out your answers."

Varying Praise
- We vary praise in order to maintain motivation for a consumer.
- We use specific praise to inform the consumer what they did to earn the praise.
- Examples:
  - Fantastic work cleaning your desk. You really did well getting every crayon back in the box.
  - Super counting! I especially loved how you remembered number 7 this time.
  - I knew you could ride the bike! You alternated pushing with each leg so well.
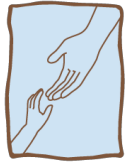
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Declarative Language

- We try to avoid asking consumers too many questions.
- We use declarative language that does not require a verbal response, rather it invites experience-sharing.
- Examples:
  - Share an opinion ("I love this game!")
  - Make a prediction ("I think we are going to the movies tomorrow.")
  - Announce/celebrate ("We had a great time today!")
  - Observation ("I notice that your friend wants a turn.")
  - Reflection on past experiences ("Last time this stopped working we checked the batteries.")
  - To problem solve ("We need tape to fix it.")
- When we do ask questions we try to be sure we can honor a consumer's response.
  - Example: If it is time to return to the class we may ask "Do you want to walk with Sara back to class or Austin back to class?" We would not ask "Do you want to go back to class?"