SCIO Language Guidelines

Let's keep communications inclusive

We view language and communication as one important component within the complete picture of an equitable and inclusive Ontario. We use accurate and unbiased language among our staff, clients, families and the greater community. Disrespectful language makes people feel excluded and creates barriers to full participation in society.

As a general principle, we encourage the use of language that does not present a spinal cord injury or a disability as the defining characteristic of a person. Our terminology is warm, inviting and idiomatic. For example, it is perfectly fine to ask a person who uses a wheelchair to "go for a walk." The idea isn't to be hyper-conscious or remove common language from our vocabulary, but rather to use people-first phrasing that avoids value judgments.

Use People-First or Neutral Language

- Person/people with a disability
- Person/people with a spinal cord injury
- A person who has a disability or SCI
- A person living with a disability or SCI
- A person who uses a mobility device
- A person who has paraplegia
- Person without a disability
- Loss of mobility or muscle function
- Limited mobility or muscle function
- Wheelchair user
- Attendant services
- Caregiver – a person who gives support
- Accessible living or accessibility
- A person, plain and simple!

Avoid Identity-First or Value-Laden Language

- Disabled, impaired or handicapped person
- A cripple or crippled person
- Physically challenged or differently abled Victim or sufferer of a spinal cord injury
- Special needs person
- A paraplegic/paraplegic person
- A quadriplegic/quadriplegic person
- Abled, able-bodied or normal person
- Immobile or immobilized
- Non-functional or not functional
- Confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair-bound
- Attendant care
- Caretaker – a person who takes care of things
- Disabled or handicapped entrance/parking/etc
- A courageous, brave or special person

Questions? More to add? Connect with communications@sciontario.org