

Working with Families with Children/Parents with Developmental Disabilities, January 2000.

## **LANGUAGE SPEAKS LOUDLY!**

### **PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE**

Every person is a combination of many characteristics and would identify some of those characteristics as "strengths" and others as "weaknesses." Most people do not describe themselves in terms of a specific characteristic because no single characteristic could completely describe an individual.

For example, we do not go around introducing ourselves by saying "I am Mary White, an average intelligence person." And, even if Mary White was introduced to us in that way, what would we really know about Mary White? Would we know what she liked to do, what she was "good" at, what made her happy or sad, where she worked or how she got along with others?

The same courtesy and respect have not been extended to people with developmental disabilities or other handicapping conditions. They have been introduced and described as a "developmentally delayed girl" or a "handicapped boy." Listeners have made great assumptions based on this description and somehow the individuality of people with special needs has been diminished.

## **EMPHASIZE THE PERSON, NOT THE DISABILITY!**

For example . . .

*A person with cerebral palsy is not a cerebral palsied person.*

*A person with autism is not a person who is autistic.*

*A person with mental retardation is not retarded.*

*A person who cannot speak is not a deaf/mute.*

*A person who uses a wheelchair is not confined to a wheel chair.*

*A person who has Down Syndrome is not afflicted with Down Syndrome.*

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