

Language Guidelines for Providers of Outdoor Recreation on Working with People with Disabilities

It is important for all service providers to understand that some words and phrases traditionally used to describe people with disabilities are no longer acceptable, as they may cause offence to individual people with disabilities.

Because acceptance of the language used in society differs between individuals and cultures and changes over time there are no hard and fast rules, however the following guidance has been prepared based on what is currently found most acceptable by people with disabilities in Northern Ireland:

- Do not use medical labels to describe people with disabilities: (e.g. 'spastic' or 'epileptic'). Medical labels are often misleading and tend to reinforce stereotypes of people with disabilities as 'sick' or dependent. Most people with disabilities find being described in terms of a medical condition as dehumanising. Instead put people first, not their disability (e.g. 'a person with epilepsy' or 'a person with cerebral palsy').
- Use language and words which emphasises abilities not limitations. For example say 'wheelchair user' rather than 'wheelchair bound'. Remember that a wheelchair can represent personal freedom for its user.
- Do not use emotional or sensational language to describe people with disabilities e.g. 'afflicted', 'crippled', 'suffers from' etc. Remember the vast majority of people with disabilities have the ability to lead active lifestyles and to contribute fully to society.

A list of words and phrases commonly used to describe people with disabilities in the past, but which are now regarded as 'unacceptable', together with preferred alternatives is provided below:

| Unacceptable | Preferred Alternative |
|---|---|
| Handicapped/cripple/invalid/ special needs | Person with a disability or disabled person |
| Wheelchair bound/confined to a wheelchair | Wheelchair user |
| Mentally Handicapped | Person with a learning disability |
| Deaf & Dumb/Deaf Mute | Deaf Person |
| Epileptic/Diabetic | Person with epilepsy/diabetes |
| Dwarf | Person with restricted growth Note: The use of 'Dwarf' is usually acceptable in a sporting environment. |
| Mental | Person with mental health difficulties |
| Spastic | Person with Cerebral Palsy |

Communication Guidelines for Providers of Outdoor Recreation

Good communication skills are vital in any instructing situation. When instructors are working with people with disabilities they should consider the following points:

Communicating with People with Physical Disabilities

In general instructors should communicate with people with physical disabilities in the same way as they would with anyone else. However, you may find the following practical communication tips useful:

- Speak in a manner appropriate to the age of the participant with a disability. Be careful not to patronise adults by being simplistic or over familiar.
- When speaking to wheelchair users, do so at their eye level by crouching or by sitting on a chair. This makes communication easier and is regarded as being polite by wheelchair users.
- When adapting skills or techniques discuss them with the participant – the individual disabled person will know how his/her body moves best.

Communicating with People with Learning Disabilities

- Speak in a manner appropriate to the age of the participant with a learning disability.
- Always ask the participant for specific information. Only speak to their carer/parent if they are unable to supply the information themselves.
- When giving instructions, use simple straightforward words and language and avoid jargon. If possible use symbols and colours instead.
- Break techniques down into easily learned steps and repeat them often and in a variety of ways.
- Avoid techniques that rely heavily on numeracy skills.
- Always demonstrate techniques and skills.
- Be patient and give participants time to learn techniques.

Communicating with Blind or Partially Sighted People

- Remember most blind/partially sighted people have some degree of sight so the use of equipment with good colour contrast will help most participants who are blind or partially sighted.
- Use the person's name to gain attention and make sure the participant knows when you are finished and when you are moving away from them.
- It is important that participants hear your instructions clearly. To achieve this always face the person and speak directly to them.
- Before beginning your session always familiarise the participant with the environment. This includes explaining the layout of the area, the number and location of other participants and the location of potential hazards (equipment etc).
- Give clear, accurate descriptions of each activity/technique and always ask the participant if they understand your instructions.
- If possible, supply written information in suitable formats. For example, large print, tape, CD or Braille. Ask individual participants what format they find most suitable.

Communicating with people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Remember there are varying degrees of deafness. Some people have no hearing (deaf) but most have some level of hearing (hard of hearing).

Ideally deaf people require an interpreter to ensure effective communication. However if this is not possible you can still communicate with deaf participants. For example many deaf people can communicate by reading lips, by using a hearing aid, by making gestures and signs or by writing information down.

The following tips will be useful when talking to most deaf or hard of hearing people:

- Make sure you have the listener's attention before you start speaking.
- Position yourself in front of the participant and maintain eye contact. Remember not to turn your face away from the person.
- Speak clearly but not too slowly and don't exaggerate your lip movements.

- Don't shout. It's uncomfortable for a hearing aid user and it looks aggressive.
- If someone doesn't understand what you've said don't just keep repeating it. Try saying it in a different way and check they understand what you said.
- Where possible, use visual aids to explain technical points.
- Where possible, use demonstrations to explain techniques.

Sample Outdoor Activity Registration Form

Disability Section:

To help (Name of Activity Provider) plan your full participation in its activities and programmes please answer the following questions:

Disability or Medical Condition: Do you consider yourself to have a disability or medical condition:

Yes No

Type of Disability/Medical Condition:

Physical Disability Learning Disability
Deaf or Hard of Hearing Blind or Partially Sighted

Other Disability or Medical Condition (Please specify):

Please provide a brief description of the effects of your disability or medical condition and of any particular needs you may have:

NOTE: Please note that it is also good practice to use font size 14 in registration forms to aid partially sighted people, as well as providing registration forms in alternative formats on request (e.g. Large print etc).