

10 TERMINOLOGY TIPS

For "Persons with Disabilities"

Adapted by NYSRTAP News

- 1** Person First. First and foremost, remember to identify a person as a person. A disability is one characteristic, like race or religion. There is no reason to refer to a person's disability unless it's relevant.
- 2** Don't use the term "handicap" unless you're referring to a golf game. Use "disability" instead. "Handicapped" comes from the old image of a person with a disability standing on a street corner begging with "cap in hand."
- 3** Never, never use "the Disabled" or "the Blind," etc. to refer to a group of people. If you must categorize them by their disability, use "people with disabilities" or "persons who are blind," etc.
- 4** Don't use terms like victim, afflicted, stricken, defective, or invalid. The first three words denote helplessness and pitifulness while "invalid" means "not valid." Choose words that promote dignity and humanity.
- 5** Don't use the terms "wheelchair bound" or "confined to a wheelchair." Nobody is tied down or locked into a wheelchair. They "use the wheelchair." It is a mobility aide, like an automobile or bicycle.
- 6** Don't use a term to refer to a person's disability unless you know it to be accurate. For example, the term "developmental disability" is often used synonymously with mental retardation. In fact, physical conditions can be developmental disabilities. "Paraplegia" and "quadriplegia" are also very specific terms.
- 7** When investigating a claim, avoid asking "what's wrong?" Instead, ask "What type of population do you serve," or "What's the nature of the disability?"
- 8** Don't be afraid to use common phrases like "see you later" or "I've got to be running along." People with disabilities use these phrases too. If you change your speech around someone, he or she is going to pick-up on it and feel uncomfortable.
- 9** Don't refer to people without disabilities as "normal." This implies that people with disabilities are abnormal, when in fact they have jobs, families, dreams, goals, strengths and weaknesses, just like everybody else. Remember, we will all develop disabilities due to the aging process.
- 10** Use words that denote respect and humanity - for anybody! Do unto others... its okay if you make mistakes sometimes. You're allowed to be human. If in doubt, ask and be perceptive of how the other person responds. That's what sensitivity is all about.