

Glossary of Terms

Ableism

Discrimination, bias, or assumptions that privilege non-disabled people and devalue people with disabilities.

Accessibility

The practice of ensuring that environments, programs, communication, and experiences can be used and understood by all people, including people with disabilities.

Accommodations

Changes or supports that help an individual participate fully and equitably. Examples include extended time, visual schedules, sensory supports, assistive technology, or modified seating.

Adaptive Technology / Assistive Technology

Tools or devices that support participation and independence, such as communication devices, screen readers, hearing supports, or alternative keyboards.

Belonging

More than simply being included, belonging means feeling valued, respected, represented, and meaningfully connected within a community.

Disability

A physical, cognitive, and/or emotional impairment that requires one or more accommodations or modifications in order to meaningfully participate in activities together with non-disabled individuals. It includes, but is in no way limited to, mental health challenges, chronic illnesses, intellectual disabilities, and hearing and vision loss.

Disability Inclusion

The intentional creation of environments in which people with disabilities can fully and meaningfully participate, contribute, lead, and belong.

Glossary of Terms

Equity

Providing individuals with the specific supports and opportunities they need in order to access participation and success.

Identity-First Language

Language that places the disability identity first (e.g., “autistic person”). Some communities, particularly many autistic self-advocates, prefer identity-first language because disability is viewed as an important aspect of identity.

Inclusive Language

Language that respects the dignity, identity, and preferences of individuals and communities.

Invisible Disabilities

Disabilities that may not be immediately apparent to others, including learning disabilities, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, and neurological differences.

Neurodiversity

The understanding that neurological differences such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and other cognitive variations are natural forms of human diversity.

Person-First Language

Language that emphasizes the individual before the disability (e.g., “person with a disability”). Many organizations use this as a default unless an individual expresses another preference.

Self-Advocacy

The ability and right of individuals to express their needs, preferences, goals, and choices.

Glossary of Terms

Sensory-Friendly

An environment intentionally designed to reduce sensory overload through considerations such as lighting, noise, movement, and pacing.

Universal Design

Designing spaces, learning experiences, communication, and programs from the outset to be accessible and usable for the widest range of people possible.

Jewish Inclusion Framing

B'tzelem Elohim בצלם אלוהים

The Jewish belief that every person is created in the image of God, affirming dignity, worth, and belonging for all people.

Kavod HaBriyot כבוד הבריות

"Human dignity." A Jewish value emphasizing respect and dignity for every individual.

Keep in mind:

- Ask individuals what language they prefer.
- Use respectful, specific language.
- Focus on access and strengths, not deficits.
- Speak directly to the person, not only to caregivers or aides.
- Assume competence.