

National Council of Churches Committee on Disabilities

Language:

Emphasize the person rather than the disability. For example, don't use "disabled student" but rather use "student with disability." The ideal is to incorporate these words into the text in such a way that the dignity of the person is expressed.

Some of the words that are currently preferred and reflect a positive attitude are the following:¹

A person who is...

- blind
- deaf
- differently abled
- paralyzed
- a wheelchair-user
- mobility impaired
- nondisabled/typical
- hearing impaired
- visually impaired

A person with...

- developmental disability
- disability
- mental retardation
- paralysis
- paraplegia/quadriplegia
- seizure disorder
- cerebral palsy
- mental illness/emotional disability

Outdated words can represent a bias or negative attitude. Below is a list of words that should not be used in the curriculum:²

- afflicted
- confined to a wheelchair
- cripple, crip
- deaf mute
- deformed
- invalid
- maimed
- poor unfortunate
- retard
- stricken
- wheelchair-bound
- cerebral-palsied
- crazy, insane
- deaf and dumb

¹ "Language Guide on Disability, The Ohio Governor's Council on Disabled Persons, 400 E. Campus View Blvd. Columbus, OH 43235-4604

² *ibid.*

defective
gimp
lame
paralytic, arthritic, epileptic
quad
spastic, spaz
victim
withered

Theological Languages/Images

The text of the curricula must consider the way that theological insights can unknowingly damage the image of people who are disabled. Watch for these issues and suggest better ways to present the information

Curing vs. healing – are people with disabilities only portrayed as being cured rather than being healed?

Disability as result of sin – are people with disabilities being portrayed as people who are disabled because someone sinned?

Fixing needed – are people with disabilities shown as “broken” and in need of being “fixed” or in some way changed so that they will not be disabled?

Special treatment – are people who are disabled shown as full members of the community or as people who are in need of special treatment?

Conversation inclusion – are people with disabilities quoted in the text or are they just spoken about? Are their opinions expressed?

Visual Images³

Look for images presented in the text. Images are very powerful and need to carefully portray people with disability as fully active members of the community.

At least 10% of images should include some portrayal of disability since 10-20% of the population is disabled.

Look for images that show people who are disabled as serving others, not just being served.

Look for mixed groups of people to be sure that sometimes people with disabilities are in the group.

Make sure that a variety of disabilities are portrayed – not just wheelchairs or people with Down Syndrome. Look for all types of disabilities.

Look for ways that people who are disabled can be portrayed in ordinary life situations – such as workers, or mothers, or teachers, etc.

This list gives you some ideas of the message that we want the readers to understand – that disability is not a cause for life to stop but rather is something that happens as life goes on!

³ Based on material prepared by Pat Carter, M. Ed., Institute for Pastoral Initiatives, University of Dayton