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LANGUAGE GUIDE

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CHANGING THE CONVERSATION For People with Disabilities and Their Families

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

For many years, advocates fought for social and public policy changes to improve the lives of people with disabilities. United Cerebral Palsy and other disability organizations rallied supporters around causes ranging from moving people with disabilities from institutions to live in their communities to ensuring people with disabilities could receive free, appropriate public education alongside their peers without disabilities, and ensuring that public places were as accessible as possible so that people with disabilities could fully participate in community life.

To the organizations that advocate for people with disabilities, these issues were thought of as “battles” in a civil and human rights movement similar to the fights to end racial and gender discrimination. Advocates often use words like “rights” to define what they want and refer to a “disability community” as their audience.

However, what we say is not always what other people hear and our messages aren’t always as effective as they could be. Many people, including people with disabilities, don’t necessarily believe their “rights” as American citizens are being denied. And many people who do not have disabilities feel alienated from the so-called “disability community.” Understanding how the broader public views the language we use is critical to enlisting more allies on behalf of people with disabilities and their families and making progress.

UCP recently worked with Maslansky + Partners to define the perceptions certain influential groups of people have about the current state of disability rights. The results were unexpected and have led us to make significant changes in how we approach advocacy. UCP’s national office invites you to join us in increasing the impact of disability advocacy by changing the conversation.

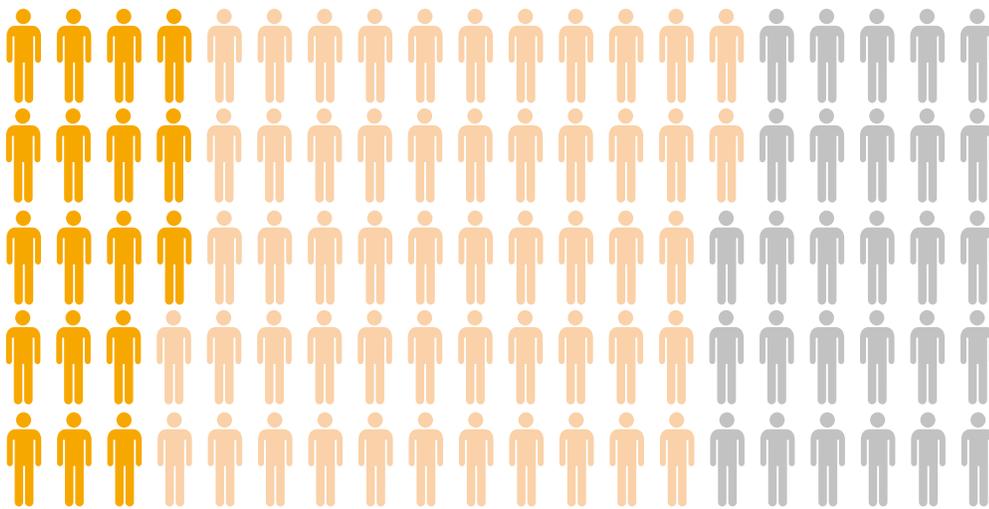
WHY DOES IT MATTER?



Nearly 57 million people in the U.S. have a disability*



More than 150 million people in the U.S. are members of a family in which someone has a disability



Each figure represents approximately 3 million people.



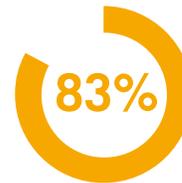
say they are registered to vote†



say they “nearly always” vote†



would vote against a candidate who favored cuts in services†



would actively support a candidate working to strengthen government services†

People with disabilities and their families represent more than \$2 billion in annual purchasing power**

How we discuss the issues they face is essential in gaining their support, their readership/viewership, their consumer loyalty and their votes. Journalists, politicians, community leaders, advocates and activists all play significant roles in shaping the public conversation about disability.

Sources: * US Census Bureau ** US Department of Labor † Maslansky+Partners, 2014

WHAT WE DISCOVERED

1 People think the status quo is pretty good. Talking about how bad things are falls on deaf ears.

However, people respond to innovation because they see the benefits in action from communication to medical care. Garner support for **IMPROVEMENTS** in the status quo, especially with **INNOVATIONS** which might benefit the entire **COMMUNITY** through increased employment, universal design, and inclusive classrooms that enrich students without disabilities with new experiences and the perspectives of students with disabilities.

2 People don't see a denial of rights for people with disabilities in the same light as in the fight for racial or LGBT equality. They don't respond to calls to "fight" for the "rights" of people with disabilities or comparisons to other civil or human rights causes. They agree there is some social stigma but they feel that they **PERSONALLY** treat everyone equally. They're offended that we might suggest otherwise!

People want to see themselves as part of a universal community, not set apart from people who have "special needs." They want to be invited and are, in fact, eager! – to be part of a movement.

3 People want us to acknowledge that we all have struggles to overcome. The struggles may be different but the goals are the same. We all want the same things out of life.

People with disabilities and their families deserve **OPPORTUNITIES** to achieve their goals, just like everyone else. That's a principle we all share as Americans. For people with disabilities, opportunity means **ACCESS** to supports and services. Emphasize the human universals shared by people with and without disabilities. Appeal to **SHARED** experiences such as family, community, productivity, knowledge, health, relationships, and happiness.

**IT'S ABOUT
OPPORTUNITY**

4

People want to hear about the people that organizations such as UCP serves and what we do, especially when it includes families. They want language that is **INCLUSIVE**, not **EXCLUSIVE**. They want to be invited to be a part of a movement for social change.

WHAT'S THE CORE MESSAGE?

People with disabilities and their families have the same goals as everyone else, even if we face different challenges. No matter how different our backgrounds, it is the same things that make all of us happy and give our lives meaning. All of us, whether or not we have disabilities, want many of the same things. We want our families to be healthy and happy. We want meaningful work. And we all deserve the opportunity to live meaningful lives.

Some people with disabilities and their families do need support in order to have the opportunity to achieve their goals. They may need a ramp to improve access to a school or office. Or a home health aide so the rest of the family can go out and earn a living. Whether you have a disability or not, we all face challenges. Ours might look a little different than yours. But our goals are not. We all deserve the opportunity to achieve those goals, for many of us that means ensuring access to supports and services.



**WE HAVE
A SINGLE GOAL:**

“ensuring people with disabilities and their families have the opportunities we all deserve.”

CHILDREN AND ADULTS
RANGE OF DISABILITIES
SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES
ACCESS
PERSONAL
RELIABLE
OPPORTUNITIES
UNIVERSAL
STARTED BY FAMILIES
PROVIDING SERVICES
UNITING PEOPLE
MORE THAN CP
IN THE COMMUNITY

AS AN INDIVIDUAL ADVOCATE:

The way a society refers to people with disabilities shapes its beliefs and ideas about them. Using appropriate terms can foster positive attitudes about people with disabilities

Adopt “people-first” language which emphasizes the person, not the disability, in your everyday language. By placing the person first, the disability is no longer the defining characteristic of an individual but one of several aspects of the whole person.

For example, it is preferred to say, “people with disabilities” instead of “the disabled.” If you don’t know the appropriate words to use, simply ask the person with a disability what is preferred. Educate and encourage your local media outlets, community leaders, organizations and others who speak or publish publicly about disability issues to adopt “people-first” language.

End the “fight.” Recognize that many people do not understand disability advocates when we say that our movement is a “civil rights movement.” Many people feel the status quo is pretty good and do not believe they personally are denying anyone their rights. Acknowledge that everyone has challenges, but we all have common goals. For people with disabilities, the opportunity to reach these goals require services and support. Discuss how communities that offer people with disabilities the same opportunities are ultimately healthier and happier communities for everyone.

Help educate others. Stress similarities and common goals when you are talking with friends and family, or with the media or community leaders as part of your advocacy. Look for teachable moments to explain why “people-first” language is important and how more alike than different people with disabilities are to people without disabilities.

AS A JOURNALIST:

Much of this is not new. As professional communicators, reporters are in a unique position to shape the public image for people with disabilities.

Adopt “people-first” language in how you write about story subjects who have disabilities. This emphasizes the person, not the disability. By placing the person first, the disability is no longer the primary, defining characteristic of an individual but one of several aspects of the whole person.

For example, it is preferred to say, “people with disabilities” instead of “the disabled.” If you don’t know the appropriate words to use, simply ask the person with a disability what is preferred.

Explain to your readers/viewers that people with disabilities want opportunities to achieve their goals, the same as any American. Their particular challenges require services and support to take advantage of those opportunities. Help educate the public about specific challenges people with disabilities face.

Demonstrate how more alike than different people with disabilities are to people without disabilities. Focus on the individual you are reporting on as a person and emphasize their individuality and humanity. Use inclusive, not exclusive language in your stories.

Many resources have been developed to help journalists such as:

- **The National Center on Disability and Journalism (<http://ncdj.org/>) offers a Style Guide and other important resources.**
- **American Psychological Association’s Publications Manual offer Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities, now in its 7th edition and available online as a downloadable PDF. (<http://ow.ly/B2lk1>)**

Connect with established sources such as United Cerebral Palsy to understand complex issues. Visit www.ucp.org.

AS A POLITICAL / COMMUNITY LEADER:

People with disabilities account for approximately 19% of the population and their family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, support workers, and other loved ones comprises an even larger group.

Know and respect your constituency. Understand that while people with disabilities are evenly split among the major parties in their declared political affiliations, they will support or reject individual candidates based on your position on disability issues.

Publicly acknowledge that people with disabilities and their families have universal needs for education, employment, housing, and healthcare along with universal desires to be valued and contributing members of their communities. How they go about fulfilling those needs and desires may

be different and come with unique challenges. You can support them by ensuring that they have the same opportunities to participate in civic life as a person without disabilities.

Avoid referring to your constituents with disabilities and their families as a “special interest” group with “special needs.” Remember that they are an interconnected parts of your community with relationships with neighbors, friends, co-workers and many others without disabilities.

MORE ABOUT THE RESEARCH:

UCP worked with Maslansky + Partners, a firm which specializes in using language and communication to drive change, to uncover a language strategy which would serve to reframe the debate on services and supports for people with disabilities in the U.S.

Methodology: Researchers used a combination of dial reactions and in-depth discussions in the focus groups. Three-hour “instant response” dial sessions were held in San Francisco, Washington, D.C. and Iselin, New Jersey. (25 respondents per session).

They also conducted a comprehensive audit of past and current UCP communications materials as well as the messages of other cause-related organizations to develop a range of language that was tested in the focus groups.

Researchers spoke to:

- **Opinion influencers** – both with and without affiliation to a social cause
- **Beltway insiders** with professional experience in related policy
- **Family members** with a close tie to someone with a disability

One-hour interviews were conducted with a cross-section of experts on disability issues including current and former Congressional representatives, leaders of national disability organizations, business leaders from LinkedIn, and Google and representatives from research organizations and federal agencies.

Maslansky + Partners also conducted a complementary survey of the political opinions and behavior of 1065 people with disabilities, their family members and caregivers.

For more about Maslansky + Partners, visit www.maslansky.com.

ABOUT UNITED CEREBRAL PALSY

United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) educates, advocates and provides support services through an affiliate network to ensure a life without limits for people with a broad range of disabilities and their families. Together with nearly 100 affiliates, UCP has a mission to advance the independence, productivity and full citizenship of people with disabilities by supporting more than 176,000 children and adults every day—one person at a time, one family at a time. UCP works to enact real change—to revolutionize care, raise standards of living and create opportunities—impacting the lives of millions living with disabilities. For more than 60 years, UCP has worked to ensure the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in every facet of society. Together, with parents and caregivers, UCP will continue to push for the social, legal and technological changes that increase accessibility and independence, allowing people with disabilities to dream their own dreams, for the next 60 years, and beyond.

United Cerebral Palsy and other national non-profit advocacy organizations can be a valuable resource for anyone seeking to understand the issues faced by people with disabilities and how individuals can get involved in improving the status quo.

Start a new conversation today by visiting www.ucp.org or contacting us at 1-800-872-5827

People want us to acknowledge that we all have struggles to overcome. The struggles may be different but the goals are the same. We all want the same things out of life. People think the status quo is pretty good. Talking about how bad things are falls on deaf ears. People want to hear about the breadth of who we serve and what we do, especially when it includes families, but they want language that is **INCLUSIVE**, not **EXCLUSIVE**. However, they expect to hear **SPECIFICS** of what we do and know that we have a **FOCUS** to our mission. PEOPLE DON'T SEE A DENIAL OF RIGHTS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN THE SAME LIGHT AS IN THE FIGHT FOR RACIAL OR LGBT EQUALITY. THEY DON'T RESPOND TO CALLS TO FIGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES OR COMPARISONS TO OTHER CIVIL OR HUMAN RIGHTS CAUSES. THEY AGREE THERE IS SOME SOCIAL STIGMA BUT THEY FEEL THAT THEY PERSONALLY TREAT EVERYONE EQUALLY. THEY'RE OFFENDED THAT WE MIGHT SUGGEST OTHERWISE! PEOPLE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT THE BREADTH OF WHO WE SERVE AND WHAT WE DO, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT INCLUDES FAMILIES. BUT THEY WANT LANGUAGE THAT IS INCLUSIVE, NOT



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