

12 Session plan: Disability terminology and appropriate language

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Learning objectives

By the end of the session participants shall be able to:

- Discuss challenges faced by persons with disabilities.
- Explain the rationale for using correct disability terminology and appropriate language.

Time allocated

- 60 minutes.

Resources needed

- PPT presentation
- Participant Manual
- Whiteboard or flipchart
- Flipchart paper and markers

Preparation

Familiarise with:

- Relevant content of the Participant Manual
- PPT slides.

Draw:

- Three faces, each on a large sheet of flipchart paper: one happy ☺, one neutral ☹, and one sad ☹.

12.1 Introduction (5 minutes)

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Introduce the session.

Explain: This session looks at the challenges facing persons with disabilities globally, as well as disability terminology and appropriate language.

Disability terminology and appropriate language

Learning objectives

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- Discuss challenges faced by persons with disabilities.
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Introduce the learning objectives of the session.

12.2 Challenges of persons with disabilities (15 minutes)

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Challenges

World Report on Disability (2011) summarized some of the main challenges facing persons with disabilities as:

- Costs
- Poverty
- Lower participation in education
- Higher rates of unemployment
- Isolation.

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Explain: The World Report on Disability published in 2011 by the World Health Organization (WHO) summarized some of the main challenges facing persons with disabilities as follows:

- **Costs:** Persons with disabilities have extra costs resulting from their disability.
- **Poverty:** Households with a member with a disability are more likely to experience poverty. It is well known that poverty contributes to disability, and disability to poverty in a vicious cycle.
- **Lower participation in education:** Children with disabilities are less likely to attend school as well as more likely to drop out.
- **Higher rates of unemployment:** Persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed and earn less even when they are employed.
- **Isolation:** Persons with disabilities face barriers such as inaccessible infrastructure in buildings and roads, provision of transport, negative attitudes, and inaccessible communication and information systems, resulting in isolation.

Explain that there are many challenges faced by persons with disabilities. In the next section we are going to focus on the language and labelling around disability and persons with disabilities.

12.3 Language and labelling (40 minutes)

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Trainer's notes:

This section uses the Participant Manual so you can turn off or blank the projector by using the relevant key/s (usually B or Control-B).

Activity

- Write down names / terms / expressions used to describe children or adults with disabilities – positive or negative.
- Swop your paper with someone else.
- Stick the word under the appropriate 'face'.

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Show the activity slide and **explain** the activity below.

Activity: Language and labelling

Groups

As a whole group

Instructions

You will need:

- Flip chart paper: **Pre-draw** 3 faces, each on a large sheet of paper: one happy ☺, one sad ☹, and one neutral ☺. **Display** the faces at the front of the room.
- A few post-it notes or small pieces of paper for each participant (A6 size, or about 15 x 10cm, or 6 x 4 inches)
- Felt pens, Blu-tack/sticky tape or similar.

Give each participant a few Post-it notes or pieces of paper. **Ask** them to write down names/terms/expression they know, or have heard used, to describe children or adults with disabilities – the names that persons with disabilities have been called. Participants to write one word or expression per piece of paper.

Encourage participants to feel free to write any words they like (in any language), both positive and negative in tone, whether polite or not.

Ask participants to swap their completed pieces of paper with another participant, so everyone has papers written by someone else.

Ask participants to look at the word or expression they are now holding, and think how it would make them feel to be called such a name.

Ask participants to come and stick the word under the appropriate face:

- If the name gives them a warm feeling, of self-respect and dignity, then they should stick it under the happy face.
- If it feels neutral, neither friendly nor unfriendly, arousing no particular feelings, they should stick it in the middle under the neutral face.
- If the name makes them feel rejected, unloved, undignified, ashamed, an object of ridicule, they should stick the name under the sad face.

Time	Allow 10 minutes for the initial writing of words; 10 minutes to stick under the appropriate face; 15 minutes for discussion and feedback. (Total time: 35 minutes).
Feedback	<p>When all the names have been stuck on the sheets, ask participants if there is any name whose position they do not agree with. They can come and move it, explaining why.</p> <p>When a consensus has been reached about words that everyone feels happy to use, discuss what should be done with the rejected words. For example, they could be thrown in the bin, or torn up by participants.</p> <p>Summarise:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labels stick! We should always be conscious of the possible effect of the labels we use, especially for children with disabilities. • We cannot always tell what effect language may have on someone else. Encourage participants to listen to each other's opinions and feelings. • If there are any persons with disabilities, or parents of children with disabilities in the group, it is important to listen to the language they choose to use. • Persons with disabilities have actual names, like everyone else – use them!

Refer participants to the reference notes in the Participant Handbook on '*Disability terminology and appropriate language*'. The notes also give guidance on appropriate disability etiquette to employ according to different types of disability.

Note that while the term PWDs is acceptable to write in shorthand, when spoken it should be spoken in full. Also, the phrase 'person *living* with a disability' is not a preferred term. The preferred phrase is person with a disability.

Summarise:

The development of self-worth and self-esteem is a basic human need, and the language we use to talk to, and about, persons with disabilities can either contribute to or hinder this development.

The language we use to talk to, or about, persons with disabilities can convey respect or disrespect, closeness or distance, a formal or informal relationship. The words we use reinforce the idea or image the person has of him- or herself. They can make a person feel accepted or rejected, part of a group or isolated, loved or unloved, valued or pitied and worthless.

Highlight that sometimes people name children with disabilities 'blessings' or 'gift' at the suggestion of others to emphasize they are appreciated but if used too frequently these names can also become a label. Therefore emphasize that it is important to treat and name a child in the same way as a non-disabled child to avoid another barrier.

Close the session.