

WORDS MATTER

GENERAL BEST PRACTICES FOR
INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

PEOPLE FIRST

People with a disability are people first and foremost.

This guide is meant to help you:

- Communicate with and about people with a disability using language that is respectful, accurate, balanced, and neutral.
- Avoid language that is considered condescending, inappropriate, and outdated.
- Identify preferred words as well as terms to avoid using.
- Use empowering language that helps everyone communicate better.



Together with our team of self-advocate consultants, we have created this guiding document to ensure we use respectful, inclusive language whenever possible.

Watch our film



Self-advocates leading the way

<https://vimeo.com/inclusion4all/ici>



The words we use matter.

Words have power.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion have become integral within our society. Language plays a part within this, including the way we **spea**k and **wri**te about people in the intellectual or developmental disability community. The Inclusive Communities Institute (ICI) has created this language guide to provide guidance on general best practices for inclusive language. If you have any questions about this guide or any of our courses, never hesitate to ask ici@inclusionnb.ca

We make choices in the language we use.

Choice matters.

Language and terms within the disability community is ever evolving and personal. This guide is designed to be a living document and can be **adapted** to meet your needs. We strive to provide you with up-to-date and **intentional** language that can be used as guiding practices.



Everyone has their own preference.

Language is personal.

When it comes to using respectful language to describe people with a disability, there are two main perspectives to consider: **person-first** and **identity-first**.

IDENTITY-FIRST PERSPECTIVE

In the **identity-first** perspective, you refer to the identity or disability first and the person second.

For example:

- An autistic person
- Autistic people

PERSON-FIRST PERSPECTIVE

In the **person-first** perspective, you refer to the individual or group first and the disability second.

For example:

- A person with autism
- People with autism

How do you know which perspective to use?

The perspective you'll use will largely depend on the individual you are talking to or about and the individual you are supporting or working with.

Ask the individual.

Tips to keep in mind.

TIP 1: Whenever possible, ask the individual what language they prefer you use.

TIP 2: Try to use empowering language that emphasizes what the individual can do versus what they cannot do.

TIP 3: Use person-first language in most circumstances/whenever in doubt, especially if you do not know the individual well.

TIP 4: Some individuals strongly identify with their disability and prefer to use identity first language.

TIP 5: If you make a mistake, acknowledge it, reflect on how it may make the person feel, and focus on using the correct language in the future.



Non-inclusive language versus Inclusive language

When using person-first language, you're also using inclusive language that sounds and feels respectful and empowering. Below is a chart highlighting some examples of inclusive terms to use and non-inclusive terms to avoid.

AVOID

NON-INCLUSIVE TERMS

- They are a disabled, handicapped, crippled person
- They are retarded, a mentally challenged person
- They have special needs or are in special education
- They take the special bus

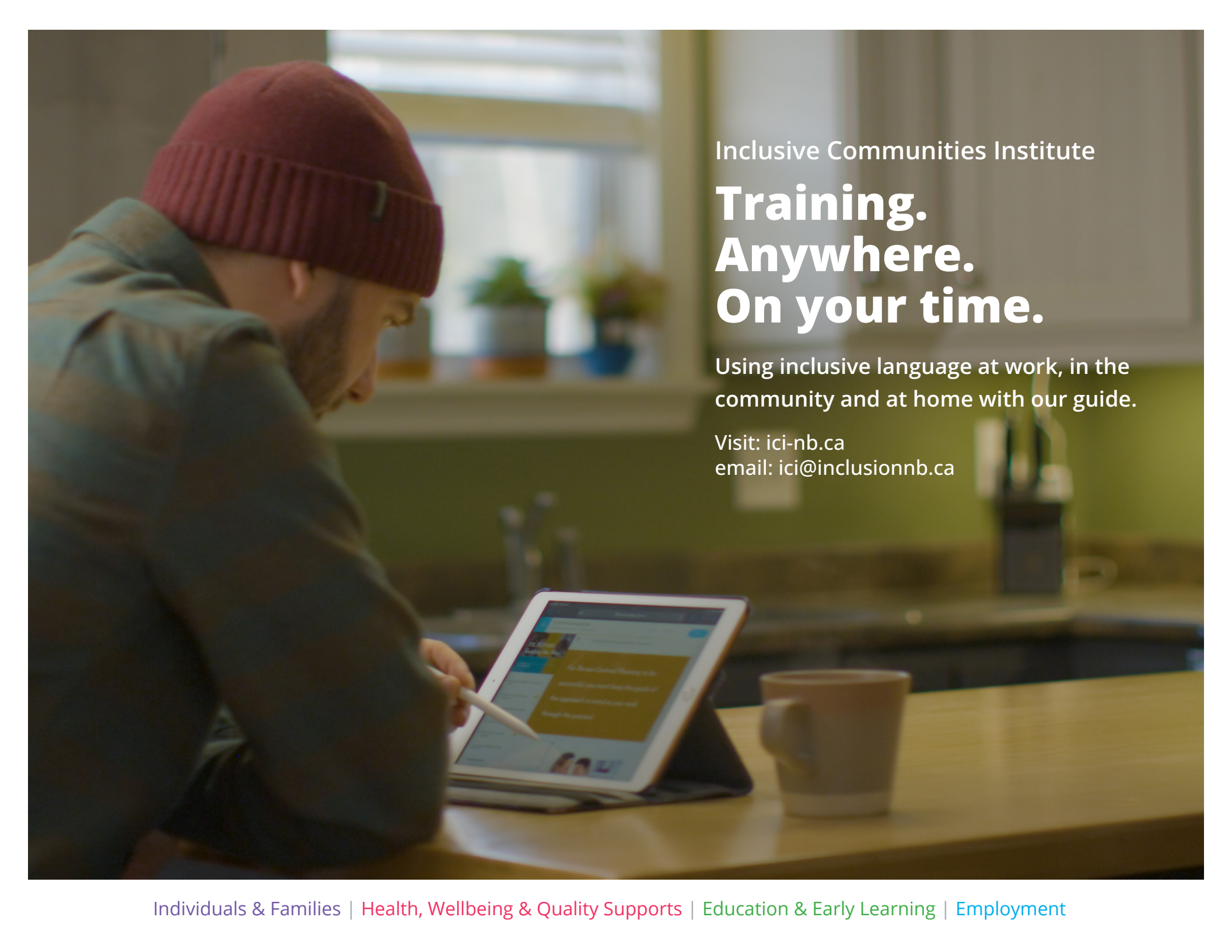
USE

INCLUSIVE TERMS

- A person with a disability
- A person with an intellectual/developmental disability or refer to person by their name
- They are a person with additional support needs
- They use accessible transportation or they take the bus



The language and preferences of the intellectual or developmental disability community are ever evolving. Being respectful of people's preferred language is essential and puts inclusion into practice. This guide is meant to be living and will be adapted and changed on a regular basis. Feedback is always welcome and encouraged. If you have any questions or comments, please reach out to ici@inclusionnb.ca



Inclusive Communities Institute

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Using inclusive language at work, in the community and at home with our guide.

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