

Autism: Language Disclaimer

Language is a powerful mechanism in shaping our understanding of the world around us and it influences how people perceive themselves and others. The words we use to talk in conversation with and about autistic people can have a powerful impact in either advancing or undermining disablist attitudes.

We recognize there are strong arguments and passions on both sides of the debate between the use of person-first language (e.g., “person with autism”) and identity-first language (e.g., “autistic person”) in relation to autism. However, there is a growing body of scientific and community literature documenting the dislike, amongst autistic individuals, of person-first language and its potential for increasing stigma. Identity-first language reflects the belief that being autistic is a core part of a person’s identity and has been embraced by the Blind and Deaf community for instance.

Based on the literature and the strong preference of the autistic members of CASDA, we recommend either using identity-first language, or more neutral terms such as “person on the autism spectrum.” In order to respect the agency and diversity of voices within the community, CASDA will use such terms interchangeably.