



Person-Centered Language

Person centered care and use of inclusive language are essential guiding ethical principles and fundamental to best practices in guardianship.

NGA defines person centered planning as: A family of approaches designed to guide change in a person's life. This type of planning is carried out in alliance with the person, their family and friends and is grounded in demonstrating respect for the dignity of all involved. Recognized approaches seek to discover, understand, and clearly describe the person's unique characteristics, so that the person:

- Has positive control over the life the person desires and finds satisfying
- Is recognized and valued for their contributions (current and potential) to their communities
- Is supported in a web of relationships, both natural and paid, within their communities

The primary focus of person centered language is the individual person and the person's experiences. It is important to use person first language and not identity or gender first language. A key term to avoid in guardianship is use of the legal term "ward" or "incapacitated person". The respectful term is "person with a guardian". Also avoid the use of the term "person under guardianship" which denotes a power dynamic.

Here are 10 examples that emphasize the importance of person first rather than identity first language:

- A person who uses a wheelchair instead of wheelchair bound.
- A person with a physical disability instead of invalid or cripple
- A person living with a mental health condition instead of mentally ill
- A person with an intellectual disability instead of mentally challenged
- A person with an alcohol use disorder instead of alcoholic
- A person with a substance abuse disorder instead of addict
- A person with a traumatic brain injury instead of brain damaged
- A person who is hearing impaired instead of deaf person
- A person who is visually impaired instead of blind person
- An older adult instead of senior or elderly person

Tips to keep in mind:

- When possible, ask how a person or group would like to be identified and described.
- Use of inclusive language demonstrates treating the person with a guardian with respect and dignity.
- Be respectful, thoughtful and inclusive of your choice of words. Words matter. The words we use are significant and may impact the well-being of a person with a guardian.