

# Disability Communication and Etiquette



6.811: Principles and Practice of Assistive Technology, Fall 2014  
<http://courses.csail.mit.edu/PPAT>



# Agenda

- Introductions and preamble
- Disability communication/etiquette
  - Opening questions
  - Video: “Ten Commandments”
- Discussion



# Safe Space for Discussion

- Be respectful of others
  - People have different experiences with disability and assistive technology
  - Don't be afraid to ask questions or voice your thoughts!
- Answers are not always clear-cut



Communicating/interacting **with**  
people who have a disability

Communicating **about** people who  
have a disability



# True or False?

1. When meeting someone who is blind, always identify yourself verbally (e.g. "Hey, it's me, Michelle.")
2. You should offer assistance to someone with a disability without being asked.
3. If you are having difficulty understanding someone, it's OK to nod and keep the conversation flowing.
4. You should always use "people-first" language, e.g. "person with a disability" or "person with Down syndrome", instead of "disabled person", "paralyzed person", or "blind person."
5. You should not use terms like "see you later" or "did you hear about this?" to someone who has a vision or hearing disability.



# Movie Time!

- “The 10 Commandments of Communicating With People With Disabilities”
- 26 minutes, 1994 hairstyles



# Video Discussion

# Video Assistive Technologies





# Common Practices

- Provide your arm to help lead a blind person
- Offer to shake hands, even if the hand is a prosthesis, or if a person can only shake with his/her left hand
- Don't touch a person's assistive aids/devices/technologies unless given permission

**SAY:**

People with disabilities.

He has a cognitive disability/diagnosis.

She has autism (or a diagnosis of...).

He has Down syndrome (or a diagnosis of...).

She has a learning disability (diagnosis).

He has a physical disability (diagnosis).

She's of short stature/she's a little person.

He has a mental health condition/diagnosis.

She uses a wheelchair/mobility chair.

He receives special ed services.

She has a developmental delay.

Children without disabilities.

Communicates with her eyes/device/etc.

Customer

Congenital disability

Brain injury

Accessible parking, hotel room, etc.

She needs... or she uses...

**INSTEAD OF:**

The handicapped or disabled.

He's mentally retarded.

She's autistic.

He's Down's; a mongoloid.

She's learning disabled.

He's a quadriplegic/is crippled.

She's a dwarf/midget.

He's emotionally disturbed/mentally ill.

She's confined to/is wheelchair bound.

He's in special ed.

She's developmentally delayed.

Normal or healthy kids.

Is non-verbal.

Client, consumer, recipient, etc.

Birth defect

Brain damaged

Handicapped parking, hotel room, etc.

She has problems with...has special needs.



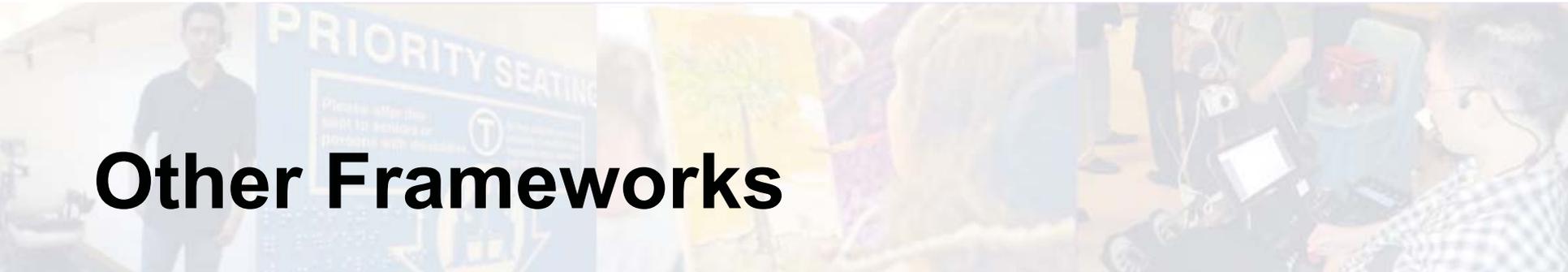
# People-First Language Exceptions?

- National Federation for **the Blind**
- Deaf culture (with a capital D)
- Abled-bodied person
-



# Practical Takeaways

- How does your client want to be portrayed/described?
- Terminology at partner organizations:
  - “resident” instead of “patient”
- If you make a mistake, apologize, improve, and move on



# Other Frameworks

- Impairment, disability, and handicap
- Situational impairments
- Differently abled/temporally abled

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