



Customer Service Notes for *Your Choice of Words is Important*

As service providers, we must be mindful of the words we use when working with participants. Sometimes, although well intentioned, we may use words that offend or confuse others, negatively impacting the customer service we provide.

Notice below the example on the left and the positive alternatives on the right.

“You have to...”

“It would be great if...” or

“It is important that...”

Telling Mrs. Jackson that “you have to stop giving Billy unhealthy snacks,” can come across as forceful and uncaring. Compare that with, “it would be great if you don’t give Billy unhealthy snacks,” which sounds more collaborative and caring.

Think before you speak and be professional with words used! Avoid words like “dumb” and “ridiculous,” and substitute more tactful words. Certain words may cause an emotional response with participants, damaging your relationship with them. For instance, instead of saying “Billy is fat for his age,” say “Billy is heavy for his age.”

Also remember to simplify the words you use when working with participants who may struggle with English. Instead of saying, “Be mindful that Maria may eventually like various vegetables,” it is simpler to say, “If you continue giving vegetables to Maria she may like them.”

Remember to consider the words you use in writing as well. Simpler is better, as participants will not be impressed by your vocabulary. Instead, they may be confused. Using more complicated words makes your writing harder to read. Experts suggest writing at an 8th grade level so that those you are communicating with are more likely to understand your message.

Giving thought to your word choice will be appreciated by your participants!

Questions for Reflection:

1. Am I using words and phrases that are clear to participants?
2. Do I simplify my communication as needed with participants for whom English is not their first language?
3. Do I avoid (red flag) words or phrases with participants that might cause a negative reaction?

