



DIGNITY & DISABILITY LABELS

This post highlights the advantages of diagnostic and educational eligibility labels for early identification and intervention and the steps we can take to mitigate their perceived disadvantages

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WHY WE CARE ABOUT LABELS

Practitioners

Families may express hesitance regarding diagnoses or educational eligibility labels for their children. Awareness of perceived disadvantages and advantages allows you to advocate for the early identification and intervention, reduce stigma, and mitigate negative perceptions.

Families

A diagnosis or educational eligibility may bring up new feelings and concerns for your child. Understanding the advantages of early identification can ease these emotions. Learning ways to advocate can mitigate the potential negative impact labels may have.



WHAT ARE LABELS?

Diagnostic labels are used by clinicians and practitioners to identify and communicate aspects of a condition to determine support and treatment.

In special education, educational eligibility is the category under which students receive the supports they need to succeed in their environment.

Medical diagnoses are separate from educational eligibility. Students receive educational services if they qualify based on supports needed rather than a diagnosis.



LABELS CAN...

provide access to
services

be an effective
communication tool
among practitioners

help form a group
identity

promote development
of effective teaching
and treatment practices

be used to advocate for
groups of people

THEY CAN ALSO...

stigmatize or
marginalize groups or
individuals

over-generalize and not
account for individual
strengths and needs

limit expectations

portray the child as the
reason for not
succeeding rather than
a lack of support

promote a negative self-
identity

REDUCING NEGATIVE EFFECTS

INSTEAD OF:

Generalizing about a group of people based on label

Assuming the diagnosis is the reason for not succeeding

Stigmatizing diagnoses and groups of people

Dismissing labels as entirely harmful

TRY TO:

Seek to understand individual strengths and areas of support

Assume every child can fully participate and succeed with correct support

Actively work against personal and societal biases

Use labels as tools to provide services and advocate for groups of people

RESPECTING INDIVIDUALS

Put the person before the label

Recognize personal biases and actively work to know each child as an individual rather than a diagnosis or educational eligibility category.

Cultivate a welcoming environment

Support children with and without disabilities to build a positive view of disability and eliminate bias and stigma surrounding disability.

Building Identity

Seek to understand and help children form their identity by asking questions, exposing them to a variety of media, and engaging in conversations about identity.

RESOURCES

[Labeling and Disadvantages to Labeling](#)

[Criticisms of Disability Labeling](#)

[Basic Guidelines for Interacting
with People with Disabilities](#)

[Tips for a Welcoming, Inclusive Classroom](#)

