



Just Friends
ADULT DAY SERVICES
an engaging and safe place

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE STYLE GUIDE

What's a Style Guide?

A style guide is a set of guidelines that help companies talk consistently about who they are, what they do, who they serve, and how they do it.

Why does Just Friends need a style guide?

1. Because No One is Old

When we tell people about Just Friends, we hear the same lines: “I don’t need somewhere like that,” “She’s not that bad yet,” and “I don’t need a daycare.” The people who could benefit most from our service do not believe it’s a fit. Why? Because not many people see themselves as old, elderly, or disabled. Studies show people 65+ who use walkers and canes do not see themselves as disabled, and hardly anyone identifies with the term “old.” Larry Minnix, CEO of LeadingAge said “Language has become a barrier to services we offer.” The same is true of Just Friends.

2. To Be Person-Focused

Our words reflect our beliefs. Challenging our vocabulary confronts our deeply held views on people and their circumstances. Addressing someone as “a lonely old man” makes it easy to think we are not that person and never will be, creating an us vs. them mentality. This allows us to pity the person instead of seeing them as someone just like us. The “lonely old man” sees himself differently. He is an artist. He is a father. He is a businessperson. Even if he lives with dementia, these identities are still true. He has the right to continue to identify himself as such, claiming purpose, success, and joy in his day.

3. To Have a Unified Message

Everyone who works, volunteers, and supports Just Friends describes Just Friends differently. When asked who Just Friends serves, answers usually include the words “old, frail, vulnerable people, elderly people, people with dementia, and disabled adults.” These terms give mixed messages about who can and does attend Just Friends. These terms do not reflect the depth of experience, skill, and strength people who attend bring to each encounter. A style guide helps everyone use the same dignified language to describe who attends the Center.

How did you decide what words to use and not use?

We surveyed people who attend Just Friends, Board, and Staff members. We also learned from studies, articles, and websites of trustworthy nonprofits who work with people age 65+ and people with disabilities (see appendix A).

Just Friends Frequently Asked Questions

What is Just Friends?

We used to say:

Just Friends is a facility for disabled and elderly people. We watch them so their caregivers can get a break.

Now we say:

Just Friends is a fun place to stay active, make friends, and learn new things. People can feel comfortable and be themselves because everyone is kind and helpful.

or:

Just Friends supports independence by providing a comfortable, familiar space and program for socialization, physical/mental exercise, creative exploration, nursing supervision, and community engagement.

Who Attends Just Friends?

We used to say:

Older adults with dementia and other disabilities

Now we say:

Any adult over 18 who wants to make friends, stay active, and live at home longer. Most people are over 65 and may need support getting places.

Why do people come to Just Friends?

We used to say:

Caregivers bring their loved ones, and we watch them during the day so they're safe.

Now we say:

Everyone comes here for a different reason, but most people come to stay active, make new friends, and learn new things. Just Friends also has licensed nurses if anyone has a healthcare need.

How do I know Just Friends is right for me or my loved one?

We used to say:

Do you need help during the day? Are you afraid of falling? Do you want a break from caregiving?

Now we say:

Give us a call to tour our center. People are very impressed when they meet our staff and see our location in person.

What's a Typical Day Look Like?

We used to say:

We make crafts, play games, and exercise in a safe environment. Our Nurses are here if there's an emergency and if someone has medication to take. We also serve breakfast, lunch, and snack.

Now We Say:

People who attend choose activities they enjoy, where they sit, and who they talk to. Activities include: >>>>>. Activities take place in the community room, Mill Race Center, outside, and off-site. Many people like our snacks and meals. Some people take medications while at Just Friends. The nurse helps when needed.

What's in a Name?

The way we talk about people and places matter. Some people who come to Just Friends don't mind "going on a field trip to Walmart." Others don't like it because it sounds childish. **The things we do at Just Friends must reflect our daily lives.** I don't "go on a field trip to the library." I go to the library. I don't tell my husband "I'm going into the community today!" when I leave for an event.

This is not easy (I, Jayme, say these things, too). It's going to take time to un-learn and re-learn how we talk about Just Friends, but we can learn together!

Here are more examples of dignifying language at Just Friends:

JUST FRIENDS SPECIFIC LANGUAGE	
WE SAY	INSTEAD OF
Adult Day Service	Adult Day Care
Just Friends Center	Just Friends Facility
Community Room	The Floor
Moved to XXXXXX	Placed at XXXXXX
Building is not accessible to people who use wheelchairs.	People "can't go there because they use a wheelchair"
Going to (name of place), going off-site	Going on a field trip or into the community
Support/assist people	Take care of, watch, or supervise people
Going on a walk with Gayle	Walking Gayle
Transport people/ give people rides	Load people
Assist in the restroom if needed	Change diapers (Adults wear disposable underpants)
Support Caregivers	Ease caregiver burden

An Important Question: Before you describe someone who attends Just Friends, consider this: If you attended Just Friends, would you be comfortable being addressed or discussed with the same terms and phrases you are about to use for someone else? If not, use the chart below to challenge yourself.

WHEN TALKING ABOUT AND TO PEOPLE

If someone describes themselves as disabled, diabetic, handicapped, etc., use that word

NOW WE SAY/THINK	WE USED TO SAY/THINK
Older adult/person/individual The person's name if we are allowed to use it Older Population People over 65 55 plus Younger than _____, Older than _____ Adults, many who are 55+ Experienced, mature	Elder(ly) Senior The aged Vulnerable adults Aging dependent Frail Weak Geriatric Old Folks X years young old and wise young at heart Homebound, shut-in
If it's not important to the story, don't say someone's age or label. Focus on what makes that person unique, not age.	
Aging is a normal human experience	Aging is something to avoid Jokes about aging Positive ageism: age is just a number "still" working, mowing, driving, etc.
Population growth of people over 65	Silver tsunami or gray wave
Lives with ... [disease, diagnosis]	Suffers from ... is afflicted with ... victim of ...
Person-first language (person with dementia)	Illness-focused labels (wanderer, poor feeder)
Type of dementia/symptom of dementia	Fading away/empty shell/not there, losing them
Changed behaviors	"behaviors"
Alzheimer's	Old-timers
Descriptive words you use with your friends: handsome, beautiful, nice, pretty, distinguished,	Adorable, Little old lady/grumpy old man, Feisty/spry, "Old lady" to describe a style

*If you have a relationship with someone, feel free to tell them they look nice! The point is to not say these things about **everyone** just because they're older. Some people don't want called cute, other's do! (ex: Say "You look great today!" - not "You look great for your age!")*

Pleasant, content, kind	Grandmotherly/grandfatherly
Mr/Mrs/Ms. +name	Sweetie, dear, honey, folks
What they can do	What they can't do or used to do
Their current ability to contribute to the world	People "used to contribute" to society
Uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user	Wheelchair bound, stuck in a wheelchair

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE – when in doubt, speak with utmost dignity

References:

- Reframing Aging Initiative
- Gerontological Society of America (GSA)
- American Medical Association
- American Psychological Association
- Associated Press
- [language-guidelines.pdf \(dementia.org.au\)](#)
- Job accommodation Network
- [elevate_aging_style_guide.pdf \(caassistedliving.org\)](#)
- [Inclusive Language Guide - NASAA \(nasaa-arts.org\)](#)
- [Age \(apa.org\)](#)
- [When It Comes to Older Adults, Language Matters and Is Changing: American Geriatrics Society Update on Reframing Aging Style Changes - Trucil - 2021 - Journal of the American Geriatrics Society - Wiley Online Library](#)
- Harvey A. Friedman Center for Aging – eliminate age bias from written language
- Guidelines for Age-Inclusive Communication

SCENARIOS: Changing the way we think about aging

Read each prompt. Would you think differently if the age of people involved changed from older to younger?

- ★ You see a man and woman holding hands at a mall and think “Old people in love are so cute”
- ★ You see a woman dressed up and think “what an adorable granny!”
- ★ You see a neighbor on a ladder and think “he is too old to be up there!”
- ★ You meet someone who works at Just Friends and think it is so sweet of them to help old people.
- ★ You see a person at a football game getting ready to climb the bleachers steps and think “he looks old. I should help him.”
- ★ Your supervisor at work is 67 years old. You want to apply for her position when she retires and think “she is too old to be working. Retire already!”
- ★ Your spouse is turning 50, and you want to have a silly birthday party. You think “I’ll give him a cane and some Metamucil to open in front of his friends.”
- ★ Your friend is growing out her hair. You think “girl, white hair makes it look like you gave up!”