Tip #7: Don’t Call Me “Honey!”

Have you listened to yourself?
Using person-centered language impacts your life and those around you. The right words can
- build relationships,
- create positive emotions,
- improve self-esteem,
- enhance physical abilities.

Do words hurt?
Language that is not person-centered makes life unpleasant for all.
- Labels (e.g., the feeder, the complainer, the Parkinson’s) turn people into objects.
- Baby talk (e.g., speaking in a high voice) is disrespectful.
- Using terms of endearment (e.g., honey, sweetie) without a person’s consent takes away his/her dignity.
- Using collective and/or plural nouns (e.g., “Should we take a shower?”) demeans that person.
- Asking pseudo-questions (e.g., “You want to go to bed now, don’t you?”) insults that person.

Which words make for a happy home?

**Use these:**
- home, our community
- move in, move out
- neighborhood
- caregivers, care partners

**Not these:**
- facility
- admit, discharge
- unit, wing
- frontline staff

Does it matter how I say it?
- Speak at eye level. No one likes to be towered over. Sit across from a person who is in bed or seated.
- Stop and talk. A “drive-by” comment as you pass is not really a conversation.
- Be polite. Please wait for a response after asking permission to enter the person’s room.
- Be heard. Avoid noisy distractions when having a conversation.

Action Items
- Encourage care partners to monitor their language for a few days to make a list of words that do or do not show respect for residents or for themselves.
- Have a brainstorming session/Learning Circle to come up with a community-wide list of person-centered words to use and replace references to people according to their care needs or diagnoses.
- Recognize staff who use the correct person-centered terms and perhaps have a light-hearted “penalty” for those who forget.

Additional Resources:
- *The Power of Language to Create Culture* by Carmen Bowman, Galina Madjaroff and Judah Ronch: [http://www.pioneernetwork.net/CultureChange/PowerOfLanguage/](http://www.pioneernetwork.net/CultureChange/PowerOfLanguage/)
- A good list of old/new terms: [http://www.pioneernetwork.net/CultureChange/Language/](http://www.pioneernetwork.net/CultureChange/Language/)