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## Activities to support DEIB during National Speech, Language, and Hearing Month

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Creating a sense of belonging is one of the most powerful – and most challenging – goals within diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) efforts. While we often focus on increasing representation, ensuring equitable access, and promoting inclusive practices, belonging is what transforms those efforts into meaningful human experiences.

According to Merriam-Webster, belonging is “a state of being accepted, welcome, and an integral part of a group, place, or organization.” It sounds simple, yet it is deeply complex. Belonging cannot be mandated or achieved through a single initiative. It must be cultivated intentionally, consistently, and compassionately.

During National Speech, Language, and Hearing Month, our profession has a unique opportunity to reflect on how belonging shapes the environments we create for students, colleagues, and clients. Brené Brown’s message – “Be here. Be you. Belong. – offers a powerful framework. The question is not whether we value belonging, but how we actively bring it to life in our daily practices.

Recent highlights shared at the National Black Association for Speech-Language-Hearing (NBASLH) Conference highlighted that fostering belonging requires more than awareness; it demands action. Just as cultural humility is an ongoing journey rather than a destination, building a culture of belonging is a continuous process. It evolves as we learn, listen, and respond to the individuals and communities we serve.

In many ways, this mirrors the work we already do as speech-language and hearing professionals. We do not apply one-size-fits-all approaches in assessment and intervention; instead, we tailor our methods to each individual’s needs, strengths, and experiences. DEIB work requires the same level of intentionality. It asks us to see the whole person – not just their communication profile, or clinical skill set – but their identity, culture, and lived experiences.

Fostering belonging begins with trust. Trust is built through authentic relationships, active listening, and a willingness to acknowledge and address bias. It grows when individuals feel seen, heard, and valued – not only for what they contribute, but for who they are.

There are several practical ways to support DEIB and cultivate belonging, not just during National Speech-Language-Hearing month, but throughout the year.

- Create space for storytelling. Invite students, clients, and colleagues to share their experiences and perspectives, recognizing that every voice adds depth to our collective understanding.
- Incorporate culturally responsive materials and practices into therapy and instruction, ensuring representation and relevance.

- Facilitate reflective discussions on identity, bias, reactions, and communication differences to promote awareness and empathy.
- Partner with families and communities to better understand cultural and linguistic backgrounds, strengthening collaboration and trust.
- Celebrate diverse communication styles and languages as strengths rather than deficits.

Equally important is adopting a growth mindset. Mistakes will happen, and discomfort is often part of the process. What matters is our willingness to learn, adapt, and continue the work with humility and compassion. We must view challenges and setbacks as opportunities to grow and refine our knowledge and skills.

Ultimately, belonging is not a static achievement but a dynamic, evolving practice. It is built in everyday moments – in how we greet one another, how we listen, how we respond, and how we create spaces where people feel safe to be fully themselves.

As we recognize National Speech, Language, and Hearing Month, let us recommit to continuously listening, learning, sharing and fostering environments where everyone can truly say: I am here. I can be myself. I belong.