

LABELS

The classic NVC position is that when we use diagnoses and labels we take away an individual's humanity because we only see the label. Once we've done that, we can too easily act with violence against this person. Even words like "child" and "parent" are labels that affect our thinking and our behaviors towards those people and towards ourselves. It's easy to see how our identity as "mother," or "dad" generates a very different feeling and attitude than, for example "friend."

Where does that leave a parent whose child has a diagnosis of schizophrenia or autism, for example?

The challenges of dealing with such family members are huge. They require much attention, care, patience and resources. Parents can feel desperate, lonely and exhausted.

In these kinds of circumstances, I think it's ok to use the label or diagnosis, judiciously. When it can support the parent by bringing relief, understanding and compassion, I believe use of diagnoses can be beneficial and actually aid connection.

When I say "judicious," I mean that parents of special needs kids will remember that the label can be an entryway to joining a support group like NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness,) or attending a lecture about symptoms and best practices. A diagnosis can help understand baffling behaviors.

I also remind myself and all parents to monitor our use of labels and to keep focusing on our sons' and daughters' unique qualities, and our own, as individuals rather than fall back on diagnoses and labels.