

RESPECTFUL TERMINOLOGY



Words have power. Self-advocates with disabilities have clearly stated that negative language leads to harmful action, discrimination, abuse, negative stereotypes, disenfranchisement, and violence.

Words like "retard" and "retarded" are derogatory and dehumanizing terms -- on par with the N-word used to describe people with dark skin, and various hateful terms used to describe members of the Jewish, gay and lesbian, and other minority communities. In addition, words and labels can cause others to think that people with disabilities are not able to achieve the things that others can achieve.

People with disabilities do not want to be labelled and they do not want to be defined by their particular disability or disabilities. Disability is a natural part of the human experience, an aspect of human diversity, like other areas of human variation. Therefore it is preferable to use "**people first**" language that places the emphasis on the person instead of on the disability.

For example, instead of saying "the disabled" it is preferable to say "person with a disability." Instead of "the epileptic," say "person with epilepsy." Instead of "learning disabled," use "person with a learning disability." Other examples include: "person with cerebral palsy," "person with autism," "a person who is blind, deaf," etc.

People with disabilities also do not want to be referred to as a victim or object of pity. People with disabilities are **NOT** victims. Disability is just one aspect of the person. Avoid using "suffers from," "afflicted with," "bound," "confined," "sentenced to," "prisoner," "victim," or any other term that implies tragedy.

For example, instead of writing "wheelchair-bound" or "confined to a wheelchair" use "person who uses a wheelchair." Instead of "victim of quadriplegia," use "person with quadriplegia" or "people with paraplegia."

Below is a useful table with more examples of more respectful terms that may be used when referring to people who have disabilities.

How do you talk about people who have disabilities?

Always use People First Language instead of labels that stereotype and devalue.

APPROPRIATE	INAPPROPRIATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• People/individuals with disabilities• An adult who has a disability• A child with a disability• A person	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The disabled• The handicapped

APPROPRIATE	INAPPROPRIATE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People/individuals without disabilities • Typical kids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal people/healthy individuals • Atypical kids • The disabled
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with learning disabilities • He/she has a cognitive impairment • A person who has Downs Syndrome 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mentally retarded; retarded people • He/she is retarded; the retarded • The mentally handicapped • He/she's a Downs kid; a Mongol • The learning disabled
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person with autism • A person on the autistic spectrum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autistic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People with a mental illness • A person who has a mental health problem • A person with dementia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mentally ill; emotionally disturbed • Demented, insane, mad, crazy, mental
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who is deaf • He/she has a hearing impairment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The deaf
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who is deaf and cannot speak • He/she uses a communication device 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He/she is deaf and dumb • A mute
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who is blind • A person who has a visual impairment • A man/woman who has low vision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blind
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who has epilepsy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An epileptic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A person who uses a wheelchair • He/she's a wheelchair user 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wheelchair bound • He/she is confined to a wheelchair • A cripple