

TALK ABOUT DISABILITIES – CHOOSE THE RIGHT WORD

Words can influence and reinforce perceptions of people with disabilities. They can create either a positive view of people with disabilities or an indifferent, negative depiction.

Here are some tips that can help make your communication with or about people with disabilities more successful:

- Use “disability” not “handicap.”
- Put people first. “Person with a disability” puts the focus on the person instead of their disability.
- For specific disabilities, say “person with epilepsy” or “person who uses a wheelchair.”
- Avoid statements that make it seem like a person with a disability should be pitied such as “victim of,” “suffers with,” or “stricken with” a particular illness or disability.
- If you’re not familiar with the disability, wait until the individual describes their situation to you, instead of making assumptions. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics and your assumptions may be wrong.

The following preferred words and phrases will help you choose language that is neither demeaning nor hurtful.

Instead of	Please use
Aged (the), the elderly	Seniors
Autistic	A person with Autism. A person with Autism spectrum Disorder
Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity	A person who has a congenital disability. A person with a disability since birth.
Blind (the), visually impaired (the)	A person with vision loss. A person who is blind. A person with low vision.

Brain damaged

A person with a brain injury.
A person with an acquired brain injury.

Confined to a wheelchair,
wheelchair bound

A person who uses a wheelchair.

Crazy, insane, lunatic,
psycho, mental, mental
patient, maniac, neurotic,
psychotic, unsound mind,
schizophrenic

A person with a mental illness.
A person with a mental disorder.
A person with a mood disorder (for
example, a person with depression, a
person with bipolar disorder).
A person with a personality disorder (for
example, a person antisocial personality
disorder).
A person with an anxiety disorder (for
example a person with obsessive-
compulsive disorder).
A person with an eating disorder (for
example a person with anorexia nervosa,
a person with bulimia).
A person with schizophrenia.

Cripple, crippled, lame,
physically challenged

A person with a disability.
A person with a physical disability..
A person with a spinal cord injury.
A person who uses a walker.
A person who uses a mobility aid.
A person with arthritis.

Deaf (the), hearing
impaired (the)

A person who is Deaf (for example, a
person with profound hearing loss.).
A person who is deafened (for example,
a person who has become deaf later in
life).
A person who is hard of hearing (for
example, person with hearing loss).
When referring to the deaf community
and their culture (whose preferred mode
of communication is sign language) it is
acceptable to use "the Deaf."

Deaf and dumb, deaf mute

A person who is deaf.

Deaf-Blind (the)	Person who is deafblind (for example, a person who has any combination of vision and hearing loss).
Epileptic	Person who has epilepsy.
Fits, spells, attacks	Seizures.
Handicapped (the), invalid, patient, the disabled.	Person with a disability.
Hidden disability, invisible disability	Non-visible disability
Learning disabled, learning disordered, dyslexic	A person with a learning disability or people with learning disabilities
Mentally retarded, idiot, simple, retarded, feeble minded, imbecile	A person with an intellectual disability. A person with a developmental disability.
Midget, Dwarf	A little person. A person of short stature. A person who has a form of dwarfism.
Mongoloid, Mongolism, Downs	Person with Down Syndrome. A person with an intellectual or developmental disability. A person without a disability.
Normal	Person who is not disabled. Specifically, a person who is sighted, a hearing person, a person who is ambulatory.
Spastic	Person who has muscle spasms.
Stutterer	A person who stutters. A person with a communication disorder.