



PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE

WORDS WITH DIGNITY

USE	DON'T USE
Person with a disability	Cripple, handicapped
Person who has... (e.g. cerebral palsy)	Victim of, afflicted with, suffering from...
Uses a wheelchair	Restricted or confined to..., wheelchair bound
Nondisabled or able-bodied	Normal (insinuates disability is abnormal)
Deaf, Hard of Hearing	Deaf-mute, deaf and dumb
Disabled since birth, born with	Birth defect
Psychiatric disability, mental illness, emotional disorder	Crazy, insane, mental patient, lunatic, psychotic, schizophrenic
Epilepsy, seizures	Fits
Learning disability, intellectual disability, developmental disability, ADD/ADHD	Mental Retardation, slow, retarded, lazy, stupid

Tips & Guidelines

- Always use person first language. Say “a person with a disability” rather than “a disabled person.”
- Do not use the word “handicapped.” Instead, use “accessible”, for example “accessible parking”, “accessible entrance” etc.
- When speaking with or about people with disabilities, focus on their abilities, achievements and individual qualities. If the disability is not relevant to the conversation, do not mention it at all.
- It is okay to use common expressions such as “see you later”, “nice to see you” or “got to run”.
- When talking to a person in a wheelchair for more than a couple of minutes, place yourself at eye level with that person.
- When greeting a person with a visual impairment, always identify yourself and others. Speak in a normal tone of voice and let them know if you are leaving or the conversation is over.
- When guiding a person with a visual impairment, allow that person to take your arm and be specific with directions.
- In a conversation with a person who uses a sign language interpreter, speak to the person directly, not the interpreter.
- When talking to a person who has a developmental disability, speak to the person directly and not to their companion.
- Always ask first before offering assistance.