

Choosing the Right Word - Talking about Disabilities -

Words can influence and reinforce the public's perception of people with disabilities. They can create a positive view of people with disabilities or an indifferent, negative depiction.

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

- Use *disability* or *disabled*, not *handicap* or *handicapped*.
- Put people first. "Person with a disability" puts the focus on the person instead of their disability.
- Avoid statements that make it seem like a person with a disability should be pitied such as "victim of", "suffers with" or "stricken by" a particular illness or disability.
- For specific disabilities say "person with epilepsy" or "person who uses a wheelchair".
- 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.



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People with disabilities prefer these terms.

| <i>Instead of</i> | <i>Please Use</i> |
|--|---|
| Afflicted by cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc. | <i>A person who has cerebral palsy. A person who has multiple sclerosis. A person who has arthritis. A person who has a disability, etc.</i> |
| Aged (the) | <i>Seniors</i> |
| Autistic | <i>A person with autism. A person who has autism.</i> |
| Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity | <i>A person who has a congenital disability. A person with a disability since birth.</i> |
| Blind (the), visually impaired (the) | <i>A person with vision loss. A person who is blind. A person with low vision.</i> |
| Brain damaged | <i>A person with a brain/head injury. A person with an acquired brain injury.</i> |
| Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound | <i>A person who uses a wheelchair</i> |
| Crazy, insane, lunatic, psycho, mental, mental patient, maniac, neurotic, psychotic, unsound mind, schizophrenic | <i>A person with a mental illness. A person with a mental disorder. A person with a mood disorder (for example, a person with depression or a person with bipolar disorder). A person with a personality disorder (for example a person with an 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.</i> |
| Cripple, crippled, lame, physically challenged | <i>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.</i> |
| Deaf (the), hearing impaired (the) | <i>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".</i> |

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