



*For me,
words are a
form of action,
capable of
influencing
change.*

~ Ingrid Bengis



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Using Respectful Language

When Referring to People with Disabilities



The words you use matter.



Respectful Language

The term "disabled" means "broken down." The use of these terms and others like them are not accurate or appropriate. They are offensive and do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities.

Respectful language is about speaking accurately about an individual with a disability. It emphasizes the person's worth and abilities. It is not about being politically correct, it's about effectively communicating on the subject of disability. The term "handicapped" refers to a person having to beg on the street with "cap in hand."

Respectful language is sometimes referred to as 'People First Language' - terminology used when referring to people with disabilities. It refers to the person first, rather than the disability. And, a person's disability should be mentioned only if it is relevant. If it isn't relevant, why mention it?

A disability is simply a diagnosis given by a doctor. If you were recently diagnosed with pneumonia would it make sense to refer to you as pneumatic? No. Just like it doesn't make sense to call someone who has been diagnosed with autism "autistic," someone with an intellectual disability "retarded," or someone who has epilepsy "epileptic."

People with disabilities are an integral part of the general public. Be careful not to use terms "we/ they" that suggest segregation or group all individuals with disabilities together, for example, "the disabled," "the deaf," or "the blind."

Don't be intimidated by terminology. Remember, people with disabilities are simply people who happen to have disabilities. The best terminology to use is that which is preferred by the individual or group of individuals being described.

People First Language puts the person before the disability:

- Are you myopic or do you wear glasses?
- Are you cancerous or do you have cancer?
- Are you freckled or do you have freckles?
- Are you handicapped/ disabled or do you have a disability?
- People First Language says what a person has, not what a person is.

😊 Respectful Language	☹️ Avoid These Words
Person with a disability or a person who has a disability	Cripple/handicapped/invalid (invalid means "not valid")
Person who has a learning disability/intellectual disability/developmental delay/ADD/cerebral palsy/autism/epilepsy	Slow/retarded/lazy/stupid/underachiever/moron/mongoloid/victim/afflicted/autistic/epileptic
People/individuals without disabilities	Healthy/normal person (this implies that a person with disabilities is not normal)
Person who is deaf/cannot speak/uses a communication device	Deaf mute/deaf & dumb
Person who is blind/has visual impairments	The blind
Person who was born with a disability/congenital disability	Birth defect
Person who uses a wheelchair/crutches (people use a wheelchair for mobility and freedom).	Restricted/confined to a wheelchair/wheelchair bound/cripple
Accessible Parking	Handicapped Parking

The above is from Kathie Snow's People First Language article at www.disabilityisnatural.com
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