



Talk About Disabilities Choose the Right Word

How do I communicate appropriately with people with disabilities?

Words can influence and reinforce the public's perception of people with disabilities. They can create either 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 all types of disabilities more successful.

- Use disability or disabled, not handicap or handicapped.
- Never use terms such as retarded, dumb, psycho, moron or crippled. These words are very demeaning and disrespectful to people with disabilities.
- Remember to put people first. It is proper to say person with a disability, rather than disabled person.
- If you don't know someone or if you are not familiar with the disability, it's better to wait until the individual describes their situation to you, rather than to make your own 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. People with disabilities prefer these terms.

Please use	Instead of
Seniors	Aged (the)
Person who has cerebral palsy. Person who has multiple sclerosis.	Afflicted by cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.

Please use	Instead of
Person who has arthritis, etc. Person with a disability.	
A person with autism. A person who has autism.	Autistic
A person who has a congenital disability. A person with a disability since birth.	Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity
A person who is blind. A person with a vision disability. A person with vision loss. A person with a visual impairment. A person with low vision.	Blind (the), visually impaired (the)
A person with a brain injury. A person with a head injury.	Brain damaged
Confined to a wheelchair. Wheelchair bound.	A person who uses a wheelchair
A person with a mental health disability. A person who has depression. A person with schizophrenia.	Crazy, insane, lunatic, psycho, mental, mental patient, maniac, neurotic, psychotic, unsound mind, schizophrenic
A person with a disability. A person with a mobility impairment or, more specifically, a person who walks with crutches. A person who uses a walker. A person who uses a mobility aid. A person with arthritis, etc.	Cripple, crippled, lame
A person who is deaf (person with profound hearing loss who communicates using sign language.)	Deaf (the), hearing impaired (the)

Please use	Instead of
<p>A person who is deafened (deaf hearing loss who communicates primarily by speech.)</p> <p>A person with a hearing loss.</p> <p>When referring to the deaf community and their culture (whose preferred mode of communication is sign language) it is acceptable to use "the Deaf."</p>	
<p>A person who is deaf without speech.</p>	<p>Deaf and dumb, deaf mute</p>
<p>Person who is deaf-blind (person who has any combination of visual and auditory impairments.)</p>	<p>Deaf-Blind (the)</p>
<p>Person who is deaf-blind (person who has any combination of visual and auditory impairments.)</p>	<p>Deaf-Blind (the)</p>
<p>A person with a disability.</p>	<p>Differently Abled</p>
<p>People with disabilities.</p>	<p>Disabled (the)</p>
<p>Seniors, older adults.</p>	<p>Elderly (the)</p>
<p>Person who has epilepsy.</p>	<p>Epileptic</p>
<p>Seizures.</p>	<p>Fits, spells, attacks</p>
<p>Person with a disability.</p> <p>The term handicapped may be used when referring to an environmental or attitudinal barrier as in "a person who is handicapped by a set of stairs leading to the entrance."</p>	<p>Handicapped (the)</p>
<p>Non-visible disability.</p>	<p>Hidden disability</p>
<p>Person with a disability.</p>	<p>Invalid</p>

Please use	Instead of
A person with a learning disability or people with learning disabilities	Learning disabled, learning disordered, the dyslexics
A person with an intellectual disability. A person with a developmental disability.	Mentally retarded, idiot, simple, retarded, feeble minded, imbecile
A person of short stature. A person who has a form of dwarfism. A little person. A person diagnosed with "Achondroplasia, SED, or what ever their specific diagnoses is", a form of dwarfism.	Midget, Dwarf
Person with Down Syndrome. One can use this terminology only when it is directly relevant. A person with an intellectual or developmental disability.	Mongoloid, Mongolism
Person who is not disabled. Person who is able bodied. Specifically, a person who is sighted, a hearing person, a person who is ambulatory.	Normal
Person with a disability. The word patient may be used when referring to a relationship between and medical professional and a client.	Patient
Person with a physical disability.	Physically challenged
Person who has muscle spasms.	Spastic
A person with a speech impairment or impediment.	Stutterer
Person who has cerebral palsy. Person who has multiple sclerosis, etc. Person with a disability.	Victim of/suffers from/ stricken with cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.
A person with a visual impairment. A person with low vision. A person with vision loss. A person with a vision disability	Visually impaired (the)