

PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE

Person First means treating others as you would want to be treated. When talking it means whenever possible, mention the person first, and follow it with any necessary description of a disability. For example, say the woman who is blind instead of the blind woman. The person is a **person first** and second, a person with a disability.

Helpful Terminology

Handicap or disability?

Use disability when you refer to a person with a disability; don't use handicapped. A disabling condition may or may not be handicapping. For example, a person who is blind has a physical disability; this person is *handicapped* when the door signs or the menus are not in braille.

Blind

Visually impaired is the generic term preferred by some individuals to refer to all degrees of vision loss. Best practice is to use boy who is blind, girl who is visually impaired, or man who has low vision.

Head Injury

This describes a condition where there is temporary or long term interruption in brain functioning. Use person with a brain injury, person who has sustained brain damage, person who has traumatic brain injury, or person with a closed head injury.

Congenital disability

This describes a disability that has existed since birth but it is not necessarily hereditary. **Do not** use terms like birth defect or deformity; instead, say a person with a congenital disability.

Deaf

This is a profound degree of hearing loss that prevents understanding speech through the ear. **Hearing impaired** is the generic term preferred by some individuals to indicate any degree of hearing loss-mild to profound. It includes both hard of hearing and deaf. The National Association of the Deaf has adopted the terms "deaf" and "hard of hearing" instead of the term hearing impaired. Hard of hearing refers to mild to moderate hearing loss that may or may not be corrected with amplification. Say a woman who is deaf or a boy who is hard of hearing.

Developmental Disability

This is defined as a severe, chronic disability of a person that:

- Is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments
- Is manifested before a person reaches age 22

- Is likely to continue indefinitely
- Results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity: self-care; receptive and expressive language; learning; mobility; self-direction; capacity for independent living; and economic self-sufficiency
- Reflects the person's need for a combination and sequence of special interdisciplinary or generic care, treatment, or other services that are of lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated

Disability

This is a general term used for a functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability, for example, to walk, to hear, or to learn. It may refer to a physical, sensory, or mental condition. Use man with a disability, or children who have disabilities. **Impairment** refers to loss or abnormality of an organ or body mechanism that may result in a disability.

Handicap

This is not a synonym for disability; describes a condition or barriers imposed by society, the environment, or by one's own self. Handicap can be used when citing laws and situations but should not be used to describe a disability. Say, the stairs are a handicap for her.

Learning Disability

This describes a permanent condition that affects the way individuals with average or above average intelligence take in, retain, and express information. Some groups prefer specific learning disability, because it emphasizes that only certain learning processes are affected. Do not say slow learner, retarded, etc. Instead, say she has a learning disability.

Mental disability

The Federal rehabilitation Act (section 504) lists four categories under mental disability: psychiatric disability, retardation, learning disability and (physical) head trauma. Use these four terms for specific instances; otherwise, mental disability or cognitive disability is acceptable.

Mental illness

Using words like crazy, maniac, lunatic, demented, and psycho are offensive and should never be applied to individuals with mental health problems. Psychotic, schizophrenic, neurotic, and other specific terms should be used in proper context and checked carefully for medical and legal accuracy. Acceptable terms are individuals with emotional disorders, psychiatric illness, mental problems, or mental disabilities.

Nondisabled

This is an appropriate term for people without disabilities. Saying things like normal, able-bodied, healthy, and whole are inappropriate. Many prefer to use the term people without disabilities.

Seizure

This describes an involuntary muscular contraction, a brief impairment or loss of consciousness, etc., resulting from a neurological condition such as epilepsy. Don't say epileptic, say the girl with epilepsy or the boy with a seizure disorder. The term convulsion should only be used for seizures involving contractures of the entire body.

Small/short stature

Do not refer to individuals under 4'10" as dwarfs or midgets. Instead, use individual of small (or short) stature. Dwarfism is an accepted medical term, but it should not be used as general terminology.

Spinal cord injury

This describes a condition in which there has been permanent damage to the spinal cord. Quadriplegia denotes substantial or total loss of function in all four extremities. Paraplegia refers to substantial or total loss of function in the lower part of the body only. Say, the man with paraplegia or the woman who is paralyzed.

REMEMBER:

- Emphasize abilities instead of limitations
- A disability is a condition not a disease.
- If you are unsure about how to describe a disability ask someone who knows-for example, ask the person who has the disability
- Be accurate and put the person first in word and thought

WE ARE ALL PEOPLE FIRST WHO CELEBRATE OUR DIFFERENCES!!!!



COURTESY OF OHIO DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES COUNCIL