

Person First Language

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I am a person first and I have a disability

When you deal with me
treat me just as you would any other person-
with respect and courtesy.

Please look me in the eye,
and speak directly to me, not to my companion,
assistant, or interpreter.

I am used to living with my disability
but I appreciate your help when I need it.

I may have trouble seeing, hearing, moving,
or processing information like you but...

Beyond that, I have the same
needs and wants,
hopes and desires
as you do.

I have problems and fears, just like you
but I also have strengths
that sometimes even I don't recognize.

I need to talk to you about those abilities
and I need you to listen.

But most of all, I need you to remember-
I am a person first!

Author Unknown

People with disabilities are people first,
people who happen to have disabilities.



Just as a person may be short or tall, have dark or light skin, a
disability is just one part of what makes an individual.

Whenever possible, avoid labeling a person with a disability,
and instead simply use the
person's name. This way,
you acknowledge that they
are, indeed, people first.



People with disabilities
have the same rights as
everyone else - the right to
have a relationship, fall in
love, marry, hold down a
job, acquire an education,
etc. Above all, they have a
right to their dignity and
self-respect. To ensure
these rights, people with
disabilities should be
referred to in terms that
acknowledge their ability,

merit, and dignity, rather than focusing on their disability. By
making an effort to become sensitive to, and aware of, the
language we use, we create an atmosphere of mutual respect.
This brochure has given you some ideas for using "People
First" language.

Quick Tips

Say...	Instead of...
Person who has	Afflicted or suffers from
Person with	Victim or stricken
A disability	Disabled or handicapped
Cerebral palsy	Palsied, C.P., or spastic
Retardation	Retarded
Seizure disorder	Epileptic
Seizures	Fits
Down Syndrome	Mongoloid
Of short stature	Dwarf or midget
Without speech or nonverbal	Mute or dumb
Deaf or hearing impaired	Hard of hearing
Visually impaired	Sightless
Cleft lip	Hare lip
Congenital disability	Birth defect
Uses a wheelchair	Confined to a wheelchair
Non-ambulatory	Wheelchair-bound
Physical disability	Crippled or lame
Paralyzed	Invalid or paralytic
Has hemiplegia (one-sided paralysis)	Hemiplegic
Has quadriplegia (paralysis of four limbs)	Quadriplegic
Has paraplegia (low body paralysis)	Paraplegic
Developmental delay	Slow
Emotional disorder or mental illness	Crazy or insane
Learning disability	Learning disabled
Non-disabled or without disability	Normal or healthy
Mobility impaired	Lame

Getting Started

- Speak of the person first, then the disability.

- Emphasize abilities, not limitations. "He uses a wheelchair" instead of "He is wheelchair-bound."

- Understand that although a disability may have been caused by a disease, the disability itself is not a disease and is not contagious.

- Don't label people as if they are their disability, e.g. - say "people with disabilities" instead of "the disabled."

- Don't patronize or give false praise or attention.

- Don't say, "Isn't it wonderful how he has overcome his disability?" People live with a disability - they have to overcome attitudinal, social, architectural, education, transportation, and employment barriers - not the disability.

- Be aware that choice and independence are important. Ask a person with a disability if s/he wants your assistance before you help. Your help may not be wanted or needed.

- Treat adults with disabilities as adults. Call the person by his or her first name only when extended that courtesy by the person with a disability. Do not give the person a nickname s/he does not usually use, say "Bill," not "Billy."

- Be aware of the distinction between the terms "disability" and "handicap". A disability is a functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability to walk, hear, talk, learn, etc. A handicap is a physical or attitudinal constraint that is imposed upon a person by society. Use handicap to describe a situation or barrier imposed by society, the environment, or oneself.

- Be considerate of the extra time it might take for a person to get things said or done.



What to Say & When to Offer Help

People Who Use Wheelchairs

- Always ask the person using a wheelchair if he or she would like assistance before you help.
- Don't lean on a person's wheelchair. It is part of their personal space.
- Don't discourage children from asking questions about the person or why they use a wheelchair.
- If the conversation lasts more than a few minutes, sit or kneel to get to eye level.

People Who Are Visually Impaired

- Ask the person if he or she wants help in getting about. When providing assistance, don't grab and start steering – allow the person to take your arm, bent at the elbow.
- Always identify yourself and any others who may be with you. For example, say "On my right is"
- Use the person's name when starting a conversation to let him or her know where the conversation is directed. Let the person know when you need to leave.
- When offering a handshake, say, "Shall we shake hands?" If the person extends a hand first, take it or explain why you can't.
- When offering seating, place the person's hand on the back or arm of the seat.
- In handling money or other papers, identify each piece as you place it in the person's hand.

People Who Have Speech Difficulties

- Give whole, unhurried attention to the person.
- Keep your manner encouraging, rather than correcting.
- Rather than speak for the person, allow extra time and give help when needed.
- When necessary, ask questions that require short answers or a nod or shake of the head.
- Don't pretend to understand when you don't. Repeat what you do understand; the person's reaction will clue you in and guide you.
- Look for communication aids like pictures or symbols.

People Who are Hearing Impaired

- If necessary, get the person's attention with a wave of the hand or light tap on the shoulder.
- Don't be embarrassed to communicate using paper and pencil.
- Speak clearly and slowly but without exaggerating. Don't shout! Use body language or facial expression to help.
- Try to maintain eye contact. Allow for a clear view of your face – the person may be lip reading. Don't speak directly into the ear.