

People First Language

What do you call a person with a disability? *A person.*

What words define who you are? The color of your skin or hair? Your age? Your weight? Of course not.

When words alone define a person, the result is a label—a label that often reinforces barriers created by negative and stereotypical attitudes. Every individual deserves to be treated with dignity and respect—regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, hair color, or anything else.

People First Language

People First Language is an objective and respectful way to speak about people with disabilities by emphasizing the person first, rather than the disability. It acknowledges what a person *has*, and recognizes that a person *is not* the disability. In putting the person before the disability, People First Language highlights a person's value, individuality and capabilities.

What should you say?

When referring to individuals with disabilities, be considerate when choosing your words. Focus on the person—and never use terms that label, generalize, stereotype, devalue or discriminate. Unless it is relevant to the conversation, you don't even need to refer to or mention the disability.

The following chart has some examples of People First Language.

Say This	Not This
people with disabilities	the handicapped, the disabled
people without disabilities	normal, healthy, whole or typical people
person who has a congenital disability	person with a birth defect
person who has (or has been diagnosed with)...	person afflicted with, suffers from, a victim of...
person who has Down syndrome	Downs person, mongoloid, mongol
person who has (or has been diagnosed with) autism	the autistic
person with quadriplegia, person with paraplegia, person diagnosed with a physical disability	a quadriplegic, a paraplegic
person with a physical disability	a cripple
person of short stature, little person	a dwarf, a midget
person who is unable to speak, person who uses a communication device	dumb, mute
people who are blind, person who is visually impaired	the blind
person with a learning disability	learning disabled
person diagnosed with a mental health condition	crazy, insane, psycho, mentally ill, emotionally disturbed, demented
person diagnosed with a cognitive disability or with an intellectual and developmental disability	mentally retarded, retarded, slow, idiot, moron
student who receives special education services	special ed student, special education student
person who uses a wheelchair or a mobility chair	confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair bound
accessible parking, bathrooms, etc.	handicapped parking, bathrooms, etc.

