

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

A person.

People First Language



Texas Department of Human Services



People with disabilities are, first and foremost, people. More than just a fad or political correctness, People First Language is an objective way of emphasizing each person's value, individuality and capabilities. It eliminates generalizations, assumptions and stereotypes by focusing on the person rather than the disability.



Why Is People First Language Important?

Every individual, regardless of gender, age, race or ability, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. As part of the effort to end discrimination and segregation – in employment, education and our communities at large – it is important to eliminate prejudicial language.

About 54 million Americans – or one out of every five – have a disability. Their contributions enrich our communities and society as they live, work and share their lives.

People with disabilities continue to seek accurate portrayals that present a respectful, positive view of themselves as active participants of society in social, work and home environments. Additionally, people with disabilities are focusing attention on tough issues that affect quality of life, such as accessible transportation, housing, affordable health care, employment opportunities and discrimination.

Recognize that people with disabilities are ordinary people with common goals for a home, a job and a family. Talk about people in ordinary terms.

Words matter. Stereotypes die slowly. Using People First Language when you speak or write about people with disabilities helps eliminate patronizing, prejudicial language.

People First Language

Labels That Stereotype

- People/individuals with disabilities
- An adult/child who has a disability
- A person

- The handicapped
- The disabled

- People with mental retardation
- He has a cognitive impairment

- The mentally retarded; retarded people
- She is retarded; the retarded

- A person who has Down syndrome

- He is a Down's kid; Mongol; Mongoloid

- A person who has autism

- The autistic

- People with a mental illness
- A person who has an emotional disability
- She has a psychiatric illness/disability

- The mentally ill; the emotionally disturbed
- Insane; crazy; demented; psycho
- Maniac; lunatic

- A person who has a learning disability

- He suffers from a learning disability

- A person who is deaf
- He has a hearing loss
- A man/woman who is hard of hearing

- The deaf
- A person is hearing impaired

People First Language

Labels That Stereotype

- A person who is deaf and cannot speak
- A person has a speech disorder
- She uses a communication device
- A man who uses synthetic speech

- She is deaf and dumb
- Mute

- A person who is blind
- An individual who has a visual impairment
- A woman who has low vision

- The blind

- A person who is deafblind
- A person who is deaf with low vision

- The deaf and blind
- He is deaf, dumb and blind

- A person who has epilepsy
- People with a seizure disorder

- An epileptic
- A victim of epilepsy

- A person who uses a wheelchair
- People who have a mobility impairment
- A person who walks with crutches

- A person who is wheelchair bound
- A person who is confined to a wheelchair
- A cripple

- A person who has quadriplegia
- People with paraplegia

- A quadriplegic
- The paraplegic

- She is of small or short stature

- A dwarf or midget

People First Language

Labels That Stereotype

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• He has a congenital disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• He has a birth defect |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• People/individuals without disabilities• Typical kids• A person | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Normal people• Healthy individuals• Atypical kids |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seniors• Older individuals/persons/adults• Older Americans/citizens <p><i>Note: some individuals prefer “older”</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Old people• Senior citizens• Old men or women |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessible buses, bathrooms, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Handicapped buses, bathrooms, etc. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reserved parking for people with disabilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Handicapped parking |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nursing facility | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nursing home |

Promote Understanding, Respect, Dignity and Positive Outlooks

- Ordinary things and accomplishments do not become extraordinary just because a person with a disability does them. What is extraordinary are the lengths people with disabilities must go to and the barriers they have to overcome to do the most ordinary things.

- Never equate the person with the disability – in other words, don't refer to someone as an epileptic or a quadriplegic. These labels are simply medical diagnoses. Use People First Language to tell what a person *has*, not what a person *is*.
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations. Say, for example, “A man walks with crutches,” not, “He is crippled.”
- Avoid negative words that imply tragedy, such as “afflicted with,” “suffers from,” “victim of,” “prisoner of” and “unfortunate.”
- Use “handicap” to refer to a barrier created by people or the environment. Use “disability” to indicate a functional limitation that interferes with a person's mental, physical or sensory abilities, such as walking, talking, hearing and learning. For example say, “People with disabilities who use wheelchairs are handicapped by stairs.”
- Do not refer to a person as “bound to” or “confined to” a wheelchair. Wheelchairs are liberating to people with disabilities because they provide mobility.
- Do not use the word “special,” such as “special schools” or “special bus” because that implies segregation.
- Avoid cute euphemisms such as “physically challenged,” “inconvenienced” and “differently abled.”



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