



People First Language

Language is a reflection of how people see each other. The words we use can hurt. To reflect the dignity of people with disabilities, responsible communicators choose language/words that put the person first, rather than the disability. The following are examples and suggestions on how to communicate using “people first language”.

- Say, “a student who has a learning disability” rather than “a learning disabled student.”
- Say, "a child who has an intellectual disability" rather than “a mentally retarded child.” The term intellectual disability replaces the term mental retardation (M.R.)
- Avoid terms with obvious negative or judgmental connotations, such as "crippled," "deaf and dumb," "lame," “unfortunate,” “afflicted,” and “victim.”
- Never refer to a person as "confined to a wheelchair." Wheelchairs enable people to escape confinement.
- If you are not sure how to refer to a person’s condition, ask. And, if the disability is not relevant to your conversation, why mention it at all?

Examples to Use and to Share

Outdated	Preferred
The handicapped or the disabled	People <i>with</i> disabilities
My child is autistic	My child <i>has</i> autism
She’s in Special Education	She <i>receives</i> special education services
Afflicted with, suffers from, a victim of...	Person who has...
Special Education student	Student receiving special education services
Confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair bound	Uses a wheelchair or is in a wheelchair