

People First Language Guidelines

When Referring To a Person's Disability, Use People First Language.

PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE	LABELS NOT TO USE
People with disabilities	The handicapped; the disabled
A person with a cognitive disability	The mentally retarded; retarded; Mental Retardation
He has autism	Autistic
She has Down Syndrome	Down's kid; mongoloid
He has a learning disability	Learning disabled; slow learner
I am Deaf, hard of hearing	Hearing impairment
She has a physical disability She has a mobility disability	Crippled; invalid; victim of; stricken with; suffers from; afflicted with; impaired
He has low vision; he is blind	Visual impairment
She has an emotional disability; psychiatric disability	Emotionally disturbed; crazy; psychotic
He uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair bound; confined to a wheelchair
A person without a disability	Normal person; whole person
He receives special education services	Special education kid
Congenital disability	Birth defect
Accessible parking, bathrooms, etc.	Handicapped parking, bathrooms, etc.
She needs support for...	She has a problem with...

- ◆ Do not refer to a person's disability unless it is relevant.
- ◆ Use **disability** rather than handicap or impairment to refer to a person's disability.
- ◆ Avoid negative or sensational descriptions of a person's disability.
- ◆ Don't use "normal" to describe people without disabilities; instead say people without disabilities, if comparisons are necessary.
- ◆ People with disabilities have very diverse abilities and characteristics. Avoid making assumptions or generalizations about their level of functioning.
- ◆ Don't describe people with disabilities who excel as overly courageous, brave, special, or super human.
- ◆ Specific disability-related information may be confidential.

Guide to Etiquette and Behavior for Working with People with Disabilities

It is important to remember that you are not working with disabilities; you are working with **people** who have disabilities. Please consider the following general guidelines as a starting point when working with people with disabilities.

- **Use common sense.** People with disabilities want to be treated with respect, as does everyone. Remember, a person is a person first, the disability comes second.
- **Don't be patronizing.** Show the person the same respect that you expect to receive from others. Treat adults as adults.
- **Be considerate and patient.** Be patient if the person requires more time to communicate, to walk, or to accomplish various tasks.
- **Don't be afraid to offer assistance.** If the person looks as if they need assistance, ask if there is something you can do. Wait until the offer is accepted, then listen or ask for instructions.
- **Communicate directly with the person.** Do not communicate directly to the person's interpreter, companion or assistant. If the person wishes, the companion or assistant can offer suggestions to help you communicate effectively.
- **Listen.** Listen attentively and wait for the person to finish speaking. If you have difficulty understanding, ask short questions that require short answers, or nod of the head. Never pretend to understand; instead repeat what you understood and allow the person to respond.
- **Simplify.** Use plain language in explanations and questions. Avoid jargon, terms of art and acronyms. If you must use these terms, provide explanation each time you use them.
- **Relax.** Be patient with yourself in learning the specific needs of each person. Don't be embarrassed if you find yourself doing or saying the wrong thing. Just apologize and continue with good intentions to learn what to do in the situation.
- **Don't make assumptions based on appearance.** An individual's abilities – and disabilities – aren't always obvious. Many disabilities are hidden, such as epilepsy.
- **Respect the person's adaptive aids and equipment.** A wheelchair is part of an individual's personal space – don't lean on it! A service animal is doing a job – don't treat it as a pet!
- **Individualize.** Use these guidelines unless someone with a disability tells you they want something done a different way.