



DISABILITY LANGUAGE

The Dos & Don'ts

NEWH EID COMMITTEE

Guidelines when
communicating with or about
disabled people.

COLLECTIVE TERMS & LABELS:

The word “disabled” is a description not a group of people. Use “disabled people” not “the disabled” as a collective term.

WORDS TO USE AND AVOID



Avoid

the handicapped

the disabled

cripple

invalid

Use

disabled

people

people with

disabilities

People-first language, also called person-first language, is a type of linguistic prescription which puts a person before a diagnosis, describing what a person "has" rather than asserting what a person "is". [Wikipedia](#)

POSITIVE NOT NEGATIVE:

Avoid phrases like “suffers from” which suggest discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness.

Wheelchair users may not view themselves as “confined to” a wheelchair – try thinking of it as a mobility aid.

AFFIRMATIVE TERMS

NOT

NEGATIVE TERMS

AFFIRMATIVE TERMS

People with disabilities

Person with a disability

Person without a disability

Successful, Productive

Has paraplegia

Has a traumatic brain injury

People who are blind; have low vision

Person who is deaf

Child has autism

Has epilepsy

Person with intellectual, cognitive,
developmental disability

Person with psychiatric disability;
mental illness

Person of short stature; little person

Has a congenital disability

Person who uses a wheelchair

NEGATIVE TERMS

The handicapped, the disabled

Impaired, invalid, crippled, afflicted

Normal, healthy, able bodied

Courageous, inspirational

Paraplegic

Is brain damaged

The blind

Deaf and dumb

Autistic child

Is epileptic; has fits

Retarded, slow, idiot, moron

Crazy, insane, nuts, psycho

Dwarf; midget

Has a birth defect

Wheelchair bound; confined to a chair

WORDS MATTER

Words Matter

A guide to disability language etiquette

*Based on suggestions from various groups of people living with disabilities.
We recognize there are personal preferences, and our list continues to evolve.

to be
like me

PLEASE DON'T SAY	INSTEAD, PLEASE SAY
"That Down syndrome kid" (disability-first language)	"A person/individual with Down syndrome" (person-first language)
Wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user, person who uses a wheelchair
Handicapped parking	Accessible parking
Handicapped, crippled	Disability, Special needs <i>(sometimes acceptable for younger kids)</i>
Retarded, mentally challenged	Intellectual disability, IDD - Intellectual & Developmental Delays
Able-bodied, normal	People without disabilities
High/low functioning	Needs maximum support, moderate support, minimal support (describe level of support needed)
Hearing impaired	Deaf, hard of hearing
Learning problem	Learning difference
Non-verbal, mute	Communicates non-verbally, non-verbal communicator
Suffering from/afflicted with [name of disability]	Living with/has [name of disability]

If you don't know, it is OK to politely ask,
"How would you like me to refer to your disability?"

thankyou!



**PARKING
ONLY
VAN
ACCESSIBLE**

**MINIMUM
FINE \$250**

ACCESSIBLE PARKING

When marketing events remember to use this term to share parking availability.

LINKS TO ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT DISABILITY LANGUAGE

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability>

https://www.diversity.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/disability_etiquette_guide.pdf

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2020/09/30/here-are-some-dos-and-donts-of-disability-language/?sh=4e9479f0d170>

<https://www.ada.gov/effective-comm.htm>

https://www.viscardicenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/2014_NBDC_Flyer_Etiquette_Words_Dignity_Disability.pdf

<https://www.fris.org/Resources/ToolKit-Disabilities/PDFs/Section-C/C2.%20Person%20First%20Language.pdf>