

DO YOU USE PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE?

When writing or speaking about people who happen to have disabilities, words should be chosen with care. Use “People First Language” to promote dignity and respect:

- Refer to the person first. Say “a man who uses a wheelchair” NOT “a wheelchair bound man.”
- If the disability isn’t critical to the story or conversation, don’t mention it.
- Describe a person, not a condition. For example, say “a person with epilepsy” NOT “an epileptic.”
- Never use the term “mentally retarded.” The acceptable terms are “intellectual disability” or “cognitive disability.”
- Never use the word “handicapped” as it connotes begging with cap in hand as the only occupation for people with disabilities. For example, say “accessible parking” NOT “handicapped parking.”
- Don’t portray people with disabilities who are successful as “heroes” or raise expectations that all people with disabilities should reach this level.
- Don’t sensationalize disabilities by using terms such as “afflicted with,” “victim of” or “suffers from.”
- Don’t use generic labels such as “the disabled” for groups of people with disabilities.
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations. For example, say “walks with crutches,” NOT “crippled,” and “uses a wheelchair,” NOT “wheelchair bound.”
- Don’t refer to people with disabilities as patients. A disability is not a disease.
- Don’t use condescending euphemisms such as “handy-capable” or “physically inconvenienced.”
- Speak of people with disabilities as the active participants in society that they are.

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