

# Watch Your Language!

The words we use to describe one another can have an enormous impact on the perceptions we and others have, how we treat one another, mutual expectations, and how welcome we make people feel. The following are guidelines for talking with, and about, a person with a disability. While these guidelines can be helpful, keep in mind the following:

- If you're unsure of the proper term or language to use, ask!
- The best way to refer to someone with a disability is the same way we all like to be referred to: By name.

## General Guidelines

OUTDATED OR OFFENSIVE	REASON(S)	CURRENTLY ACCEPTED*
"The" anything: The blind The disabled The autistic	Views people in terms of their disability Groups people into one undifferentiated category Condescending Does not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities	- People with disabilities - Deaf people - People who are blind - People who are visually impaired - People with autism
Handicapped	Outdated; connotes that people with disabilities need charity Disabilities don't handicap: Attitudes and architecture handicap	People with disabilities
The disabled	An individual is a person before one is disabled. People with disabilities are individuals who share a common condition.	People with disabilities
Admits she/he has a disability	Disability is not something people "admit" to or needs to be admitted to	Says she/he has a disability
Normal, healthy, whole (when speaking about people without disabilities as compared to people with disabilities)	People with disabilities may also be normal, healthy, and whole  Implies that the person with a disability isn't normal	- Non-disabled - Person without a disability
Courageous	Implies person has courage because of	- Has overcome

	having a disability	his/her disability - Successful, productive
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## Specific Disabilities and Conditions

OUTDATED OR OFFENSIVE	REASON(S)	CURRENTLY ACCEPTED*
Deaf and dumb Dumb Deaf-mute	Implies mental incapacitation Simply because someone is deaf does not mean that they cannot speak	- Deaf - Non-verbal - Hard of hearing - Person who does not speak - Unable to speak - Uses synthetic speech
Hearing-impaired Suffers a hearing loss	Negative connotation of "impaired," "suffers"	- Deaf - Hard of hearing
Slurred speech Unintelligible speech	Stigmatizing	- Person/people with a communication disability - Person/people with slow speech
Confined to a wheelchair Wheelchair-bound	Wheelchairs don't confine; they make people mobile	- Uses a wheelchair - Wheelchair user - Person who uses a wheelchair
Cripple Crippled	From Old English, meaning "to creep"; was also used to mean "inferior" Dehumanizing	- Has a disability - Physical disability
Deformed Freak Vegetable	Connotes repulsiveness, oddness Dehumanizing	- Multiple disabilities - Severe disabilities
Crazy Insane Psycho Maniac Nut Case	Stigmatizing Considered offensive Reinforces negative stereotypes	- Behavior disability - Emotional disability - Person with mental illness - Person with a psychiatric disability

Retarded Retardate Mentally defective Slow Simple Moron Idiot	Stigmatizing Implies that a person cannot learn	- Developmentally delayed - Developmental disability (the term "mental retardation" is no longer acceptable )
Mongoloid	Considered offensive	Person with Down syndrome
Stricken/Afflicted by MS	Negative connotation of "afflicted," "stricken"	Person who has multiple sclerosis
CP victim	Cerebral palsy does not make a person a "victim"	Person with cerebral palsy
Epileptic	Not "person-first" language Stigmatizing	- Person with epilepsy - Person with seizure disorder
Fit	Reinforces negative stereotypes	Seizure
Birth defect	Implies there was something wrong with the birth	Congenital disability
Deinstitutionalized	Stigmatizing Groups people into one category Not focused on the individual	Person who used to live in an institution
Midget	Outdated term Considered offensive	Person of short stature

\* All currently accepted terms should be used with "people-first" language - i.e., "people with...," "person with...." The exception to this are "deaf people" and "deaf community," which are fine.

Adapted from material developed by : Mid-Hudson Library System, Outreach Services Department, 103 Market Street, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601 (914) 471-6006.