

For more information about *People First Language*, you may contact the following:



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# People *First*

*A Guide for Using  
People First Language*

## Choosing to Use People First Language

Generally, in choosing words about people with disabilities, the guiding principle is to refer to the person first, not the disability. In place of saying “the disabled,” it is preferable to say “people with disabilities. This way the emphasis is placed on the person, not the disability.

It is only important to refer to the person’s disability if it is relevant to the conversation or situation. Disability should not be the primary, defining characteristic of an individual, but merely one aspect of the whole person.

## Why Should You Use People First Language?

People who have disabilities are present in every aspect of society. They are:

- ◆ moms and dads, sons and daughters...
- ◆ employees and employers...
- ◆ scientists (Stephen Hawking)...
- ◆ friends and neighbors...
- ◆ movie stars (Marlee Matlin)...
- ◆ students and teachers...

Most importantly, they are *people first*.

Many labels used for disabilities in our society have negative connotations or are misleading. Using labels contributes to negative stereotypes. All of these words devalue the person they attempt to describe.

### The following terms should be avoided when speaking to, or about, persons with disabilities.

invalid	wheelchair-bound
mongoloid	deaf and dumb
defective	mute
victim	crippled
special person	suffers from
handicapped	stricken with
a patient	retarded
afflicted with	

## Examples of People First Language

The following statements are examples of People First Language:

### people with disabilities or people who have disabilities

- ◆ NOT the handicapped or disabled

### he/she uses a wheelchair

- ◆ NOT he/she is wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair

### he/she has a congenital disability

- ◆ NOT he/she has a birth defect

### accessible parking or bathrooms

- ◆ NOT handicapped parking or bathrooms

### he/she has a need for... // he/she needs...

- ◆ NOT she has a problem with...

### he/she has a cognitive disability or he/she has mental retardation

- ◆ NOT he/she is retarded or MR

## General Guidelines for Talking about Disability

1. **Do not refer to a person’s disability unless it is relevant to the conversation.**
2. **Use “disability” rather than “handicap” to refer to a person’s disability.** Never use “cripple/crippled” in any reference to disability.
3. **When referring to a person’s disability, use *People First Language*.**
4. **Avoid referring to people with disabilities as “the disabled, the blind, the epileptics, the retarded, etc.”** Descriptive terms should be used as adjectives, not nouns.
5. **Avoid negative or sensational descriptions of a person’s disability. Don’t say “suffers from, a victim of, or afflicted with.”** These portrayals elicit unwanted sympathy or pity toward people with disabilities.
6. **Don’t use “normal” or “able-bodied” to describe people who do not have disabilities.** It is better to say “people without disabilities,” if necessary to make comparisons.