

People First Language

Words are powerful and they can build up or break down!!

Using People First Language—putting the person before the disability—and eliminating old, prejudicial, and hurtful descriptors, can move us in a new direction.

“People First Language” is used to speak appropriately and respectfully about an individual who is differently abled. People first language emphasizes the person first, not the disability. For example, when referring to a person with a disability or diagnosis, refer to the person first by using phrases such as: “a person who ...”, “a person with ...” or, “person who has...” The list below includes “People first language” as well as language to avoid.

People First:	Language to Avoid
She is differently abled	She is a handicapped or disabled person, “special ed”
He has autism or is on the autism spectrum	He is autistic, “special ed”
She has Down syndrome	She is retarded, “special ed”
He has a learning impairment	He is retarded, “special ed”, dumb
She is blind or visually impaired	Referring to person as “the blind”
He is deaf or hard of hearing	He is deaf-and-dumb, deaf-mute
She has a speech/communication impairment	She is dumb, “speaks bad”
He has a physical impairment	He is crippled, handicapped, deformed, lame
She uses a wheelchair	She is handicapped, deformed, cripple, wheelchair-bound, lame
He receives special ed services	He’s in special ed
She has a developmental delay	She’s developmentally delayed
He is of short stature, little person	He is a dwarf, midget
Children without disabilities	Normal or healthy kids
He needs...or he uses	He has a problem with....He has special needs
She has a brain injury	She is brain damaged
Accessible parking, hotel room, etc.	Handicapped parking, hotel room, etc.