

People-First Language



A service of the Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council
and SAIL Coalition (Self Advocates In Leadership)

People-first language uses words that reflect awareness, dignity and a positive attitude about people with disabilities. Emphasis is placed on the person first, rather than the disability. Example: "John is a writer who has a disability," rather than "John is a disabled writer." By using people-first language, we gently create awareness that the focus/subject is the person, thereby demonstrating respect toward that person.

People-First Language Preferred Expressions

Say/Write...	Instead of...
Child with a disability	disabled, invalid or handicapped child
Individual with cerebral palsy	palsied, CP or spastic
Person who has....	Afflicted, suffers from, victim of
Nonverbal (with speech)	mute or dumb
Child(ren) with autism	autistic
Developmental delay	slow or retarded
Emotional disorder/mental illness	crazy or insane
Deaf or has a hearing impairment	deaf and dumb
Communicates with sign language	signer
Uses a wheelchair	confined to a wheelchair
Has a cognitive disability	retarded
He has epilepsy	epileptic
Adult with Down syndrome	mongoloid, suffers from Down syndrome
Has a learning disability	is learning disabled
Has a physical disability	is physically disabled/crippled
Non-disabled	normal, healthy
Congenital disability	birth defect
Condition	disease (unless it is indeed defined as a disease)
Seizures	fits
Cleft lip	hare lip
Has mobility impairment	lame or crippled
Paralyzed	invalid or paralytic
Has quadriplegia	quadriplegic
Has paraplegia	paraplegic

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