

What is Person-first Language?

Communicating with and about a person with a disability recognizes them as a *person first* and their disability status or identity as secondary. Communicating with person-first language shows respect for and acknowledges the dignity of people with disabilities. Keep in mind that the person [*alone*] decides when and how they identify. Discovering one's self-identity is discovering how one sees themselves in the world, one's place in it, and what they will need to navigate it successfully.

| Person First Language | Language to Avoid |
|---|--|
| A person with a disability | Disabled, handicapped |
| A person who is hard of hearing | Hearing impaired, suffers a hearing loss |
| A person who is deaf | Deaf, dumb, mute |
| A person who is blind/visually impaired | The blind |
| A person with an intellectual/developmental disability | Challenged, special, retarded, slow, or dumb |
| A person who uses a wheelchair | Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound |
| A person who has a communication disorder is unable to speak, or uses a device to speak | Mute, non-verbal |
| A person with a physical disability | Crippled, lame, invalid |
| Accessible bathrooms, seating | Handicapped bathroom, seating |
| A person with a mental health disability, a person with an emotional or behavioral disability | Crazy, nuts, insane, psycho, maniac |
| GIRL SCOUT | Member with a disability |

Quick Tips to Remember

The person decides if, when, and how they identify. Emphasize a person's ability rather than a limitation.

Use language that empowers rather than reinforcing stereotypes. Acknowledge the need for accessibility rather than highlighting disability.

Avoid portraying people with disabilities as heroic, brave, inspirational, etc., solely based on disability status.

Disabilities can affect people differently, even when one person has the same type of disability as another person. Some disabilities may be hidden or not easy to see.