



Appropriate Language for Persons with Disabilities

Attitudinal barriers are one of the major challenges for persons with disabilities. An attitudinal barrier exists when bias and stereotypes about persons with disabilities impede their full participation in all aspects of society. Challenging attitudinal barriers and transforming negative stereotypes that are often associated with persons with disabilities begins with changing the language we use to describe persons with disabilities.

The table below outlines the appropriate terminology to use when describing a person with a disability. Please remain mindful that language is constantly changing. This resource should be used as a supplement to ongoing learning.

Instead of:	Please use:
Aged The elderly	Seniors
Autistic	A person with Autism A person with Autism Spectrum Disorder
Birth defect Congenital defect	A person who has a congenital deformity disability A person with a disability since birth
Confined to wheelchair Wheelchair bound	A person who uses a wheelchair
Crazy Insane Lunatic Psycho Mental	A person with a mental illness A person with a mental disorder A person with a mood disorder (for example, a person with depression, a person with bipolar disorder)

Instead of:	Please use:
Mental patient Maniac Neurotic Psychotic Bipolar Unsound mind Schizophrenic	A person with an anxiety disorder (for example, a person with obsessive compulsive disorder) A person with an eating disorder (for example, a person with anorexia nervosa, a person with bulimia) A person with schizophrenia
Cripple Crippled Lame Physically challenged	A person with a disability A person with a physical disability A person with a spinal cord injury A person who uses a walker A person who uses a mobility aid
Deaf Hearing impaired	A person who is Deaf (for example, a person with profound hearing loss) A person who is deafened (for example, a person who has become deaf later in life) A person who is hard of hearing (for example, person with hearing loss) Please note: When referring to the deaf community and their culture (whose preferred mode of communication is sign language) it is acceptable to use "the Deaf
Deaf and dumb Deaf mute	A person who is deaf
Deaf-blind	A person who is deaf blind (for example, a person who has any combination of vision and hearing loss)

Instead of:	Please use:
Epileptic	A person who has epilepsy
Fits Spells Attacks	Seizures
Handicapped Invalid Patient Disabled	A person with a learning disability People with learning disabilities
Learning disabled Learning disordered Dyslexic	A person with a learning disability People with learning disabilities
Mentally retarded Idiot Simple Feeble minded	A person with an intellectual disability A person with a developmental disability
Midget Dwarf	A little person A person of short stature A person who has a form of dwarfism
Normal	A person without a disability (for example, a person who is sighted, a hearing person, a person who is ambulatory)
Spastic	A person who has muscle spasms A person with a communication disorder
Stutterer	A person who stutters A person with a communication disorder

Sources:

The information in this document was compiled by Human Rights and Diversity | HR Services with information from [Appropriate Language](#) Seneca College and [A Way With Words](#) George Brown College.