

Guidelines for Reporting about People with Disabilities

for media representatives

USING PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE downplays sensationalized misperceptions that people with disabilities are primarily needy and dependent. Using phrases like “woman with autism” or “person with disabilities” puts the focus on the fact that they are a person, and are not defined by the disability that they happen to have.

Offensive terms:

crippled
deformed
suffers from
victim of
retarded
handicapped
infirm
deaf and dumb
epileptic, diabetic, autistic
wheelchair-bound
handicapable
mentally different
physically inconvenienced
pitiful
unfortunate
diseased
a patient
a case
a client
a consumer
able-bodied
slow

FOCUSING ON QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES that affect people with and without disabilities, like transportation, housing, health care, employment, helps dispel myths.

SHOWING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AS ACTIVE participants in society, interacting with non-disabled people in social and work environments, helps break down community barriers and opens lines of communication and acceptance.

As a professional communicator, we respect your unique and important position that has the potential to shape the public image of people with disabilities.

Reproduced by the Advocacy in Media (AIM) Committee of Community Ambassadors Resource Alliance (CARA) from a similar guide by Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council

We hope you find this guide helpful as a courtesy reference for promoting positive views of people with disabilities. The professionals listed at the end of this publication are more than happy to clarify *People First Language*. Please do not hesitate to contact them at any time.

Reflecting input from more than 100 disability organizations, this guide defines the preferred terms for referring to people with disabilities. Referencing people with disabilities in this manner is what we call using *People First Language*.

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) involves learning and behavioral problems that do not have any serious underlying physical or mental causes and is characterized especially by difficulty in sustaining attention, impulsive behavior, and excessive activity.

Offensive: hyperactive
Preferred: child with ADHD

Autism is a mental disability originating in infancy that may be characterized by absorption in self-centered subjective mental activity, especially when accompanied by marked withdrawal from reality, inability to interact socially, repetitive behavior, and language dysfunction.

Offensive: autistic
Preferred: child with autism, child who has autism

Blindness occurs when a person has loss of vision for ordinary life purposes. Visually impaired is the generic term used by some to refer to all degrees of vision loss.

Offensive: blind
Preferred: person who is visually impaired, person with visual impairments

Brain injury occurs with a long-term or temporary disruption in brain function resulting from injury to the brain. Difficulties with cognitive, physical, emotional, and/or social functioning may occur.

Offensive: brain damaged, suffers from brain damage, victim of brain damage
Preferred: person who has a brain injury

Deafness is a profound hearing loss that results in development of language skills - often American Sign Language - that are different from those developed by individuals who have hearing. Because of this difference, some who are deaf see their culture as distinct from those with less significant hearing loss. This difference in philosophy among people who cannot hear and those who have varying degrees of hearing creates challenges in using People First Language.

Offensive: (ask the person who is being written or talked about)
Preferred: (ask the person who is being written or talked about)

Developmental disability is a mental or physical disability that occurs at birth or in infancy where one or more major life activities is limited indefinitely. Individuals with mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy and other seizure disorders, sensory impairments, traumatic injuries, or effects from diseases like polio, muscular dystrophy, etc., may be considered to have a developmental disability.

Offensive: retarded, disabled, handicapped, autistic, epileptic, brain damaged
Preferred: individual with: a disability, mental retardation, autism, epilepsy, a brain injury, etc.

Disability is a general term used for a functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability, for example, to walk, lift, hear, or learn, and may be physical, sensory, or mental.

Offensive: the handicapped, the mentally or physically disabled, special, retarded

Preferred: person with: a disability, mental retardation

Down Syndrome describes a chromosomal irregularity that results in a delay in physical, intellectual, and language development.

Offensive: Mongol, Mongoloid, Down's baby

Preferred: Person with Down Syndrome

Learning disability is anything permanent that affects the way a person takes in, retains, and expresses information. Some groups prefer that a specific learning disability is referenced, emphasizing that only certain learning processes are affected.

Offensive: slow, retarded

Preferred: child with a learning disability, child who has learning disability

Mental retardation refers to some degree of intellectual delay, which can range from mild to profound depending upon the cause. Individuals may live completely independently or partially independently with environmental or personal supports. Current debate is heated among individuals with disabilities and their families, as well as professionals, about the use of this term. Some organizations use "people with cognitive impairments, intellectual delays, or developmental disabilities." Other organizations find these terms too confusing. Clarifying with the subjects in the story about the preferred term is best.

Offensive: retarded, slow, the retarded

Preferred: (ask the person who is being written or talked about)

Seizure is an involuntary muscular contraction or a brief impairment or loss of consciousness resulting from something neurological like epilepsy, or from a brain injury.

Offensive: fit, spastic, epileptic

Preferred: person who has a seizure disorder, person who had a seizure

Small/short stature describes people under 4'10" tall. Groups who focus on this issue are divided between using "little people" and "dwarfs," as some are offended by those terms, some are not.

Offensive: midget

Preferred: (ask the person who is being written or talked about)

Speech disorder is when a person has limited or difficult speech patterns.

Offensive: mute, dumb

Preferred: person who has a speech disorder

Spinal cord injury occurs when there has been permanent damage to the spinal cord. Quadriplegia is a substantial or significant loss of function in all four extremities. Paraplegia refers to substantial or significant loss of function in the lower part of the body only.

Offensive: quadriplegic, paraplegic

Preferred: person with a spinal cord injury, person who has quadriplegia or paraplegia

Stroke is caused by interruption of blood to the brain. Hemiplegia (paralysis on one side) may result.

Offensive: stroke victim

Preferred: person who had a stroke

Feel free at any time to contact any of the professionals listed below for assistance with *People First Language*.

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Representatives from dozens of agencies working within the Hamilton County community to increase involvement of individuals with mental retardation and developmental disabilities and to raise funds to meet their needs