



Communicating With and About People With Disabilities

About 1 in 4, or 61 million, U.S. adults reports having some form of a disability.¹ Disability is part of the human experience, but sometimes people use words or phrases that are insensitive and do not promote understanding, dignity, and respect for people with disabilities. Most often than not, this is not intentional, but is disrespectful just the same.

People-First Language

People-first language is used to communicate appropriately and respectfully with and about an individual with a disability. People-first language emphasizes the person first, not the disability. For example, when referring to a person with a disability, refer to the person first, by using phrases such as, “a person who ...”, “a person with ...” or, “person who has ...”

These are some general tips you can follow:

- People-first language is the best place to start when talking to a person with a disability.
- If you are unsure, ask the person how he or she would like to be described.
- It is important to remember that preferences can vary.

Tips	Use	Do not use
Emphasize abilities, not limitations	Person who uses a wheelchair	Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound
	Person who uses a device to speak	Can't talk, mute
Do not use language that suggests the lack of something	Person with a disability	Disabled, handicapped
	Person of short stature	Midget
	Person with cerebral palsy	Cerebral palsy victim
	Person with epilepsy or seizure disorder	Epileptic
	Person with multiple sclerosis	Afflicted by multiple sclerosis
Emphasize the need for accessibility, not the disability	Accessible parking or bathroom	Handicapped parking or bathroom
Do not use offensive language	Person with a physical disability	Crippled, lame, deformed, invalid, spastic
	Person with an intellectual, cognitive, developmental disability	Slow, simple, moronic, defective, afflicted, special person
	Person with an emotional or behavioral disability, a mental health impairment, or a psychiatric disability	Insane, crazy, psycho, maniac, nuts
Avoid language that implies negative stereotypes	Person without a disability	Normal person, healthy person
Do not portray people with disabilities as inspirational only because of their disability	Person who is successful, productive	Has overcome his/her disability, is courageous

1Okoro CA, Hollis ND, Cyrus AC, Griffin-Blake S. Prevalence of Disabilities and Health Care Access by Disability Status and Type Among Adults— United States, 2016. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep. 2018; 67:882–887. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6732a3l>.

For more resources on disability inclusion, visit: www.cdc.gov/disabilities