

People First Language



What is People First Language?

People First Language eliminates generalizations and stereotypes by focusing on the person rather than the disability.

Words are powerful; old, inaccurate and inappropriate descriptors perpetuate negative stereotypes and attitudes. When we describe people by a medical diagnosis first, we devalue and disrespect them as individuals. In contrast, using thoughtful descriptions can foster positive attitudes about people with disabilities.

One of the major improvements in communicating with and about people with disabilities is "People First Language." People First Language emphasizes the person, not the disability. By placing the person first, the disability is no longer the primary, defining characteristic of an individual. Instead, it is one of several aspects of the whole person.

People with disabilities are – first and foremost – people who have abilities, interests and needs. They are moms, dads, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, friends, neighbors, co-workers, students and teachers. About 54 million Americans – one out of every five individuals – have a disability. Their contributions enrich our communities and society as they live, work and share their lives.

This text adapted from: The Arc. "What is People First Language?"
<http://www.thearc.org/who-we-are/media-center/people-first-language>



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Examples of People First Language

Say:

People with disabilities

Child with a disability

People without disabilities

He has an intellectual disability.
He has a cognitive disability.

She uses a wheelchair.

He has a learning disability.

She has a mental illness.

He has Down syndrome.

She has autism.

Instead of:

The handicapped
The disabled

Special needs child
Handicapped child
Disabled child

Normal people

He is mentally retarded.
He is mentally handicapped.

She is wheelchair bound.
She is confined to a wheelchair.

He is learning disabled.

She is mentally ill.

He is Down's.
He is a Down's child.

She is autistic.
She is an autistic child.



Center for Learning and Leadership

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