



# National Service Inclusion Project:

## Fact Sheet

### Person-First Language and Basic Disability Etiquette

#### Language

Using proper language is not simply being "politically correct." There are reasons to avoid using certain terms. For example:

##### Why should we avoid the term "cripple"?

- "Cripple" is derived from the old German term "kripple," which means "to be without power," which is completely untrue.

##### Why should we not use the term "handicapped?"

- Handicapped implies having an imposed disadvantage.
- Many individuals with disabilities were not allowed to work in Europe, and they were forced to beg in the streets by holding their "cap in hand."

##### Why should we avoid the term "wheelchair-bound?"

- A wheelchair is a means of mobility and freedom, not something that restricts anyone.

**The key to language is very basic: Always use person-first language, as people with disabilities are human first and disability second.**

- "A person who is blind" as opposed to "a blind person."
- "An individual with epilepsy" instead of "an epileptic."
- "A boy who has Down's syndrome," not "a retarded child."

#### Etiquette

The National Service Inclusion Project

[www.serviceandinclusion.org](http://www.serviceandinclusion.org)

[nsip@umb.edu](mailto:nsip@umb.edu)

888-491-0326 (voice/TTY)



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An individual with disability is a human being. It's as simple as that.

**Treat adults as adults:** Treat everyone the way you'd want people to treat you.

**It is okay to offer assistance.** Here are some tips:

- Always ask first.
- Understand the clarified assistance.
- Realize that different people have different preferences.
- Some people don't want or need help... accept "no" to your offer.

**Make a mistake?** Apologize, correct the error, learn, and move on.

**RELAX!** It is okay to say to a person who is blind, "I'll see you later," or ask a person in a wheelchair to go for a walk. It's part of our everyday language and not always taken literally.

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### **Person-First Language**

The words we use to describe one another can have an enormous impact on the perceptions we and others have, how we treat one another, mutual expectations, and how welcome we make people feel. The following are guidelines for talking with, and about, a person with a disability. While these guidelines can be helpful, keep in mind the following:

- If you're unsure of the proper term or language to use, ask!
- The best way to refer to someone with a disability is the same way we all like to be referred to: by name.

| <b>Outdated or Offensive</b>                                 | <b>Reason(s)</b>  | <b>Currently Accepted</b>   |
|--|---|---|
| "The" anything:<br>The blind<br>The disabled<br>The autistic | Views people in terms of their disability. Groups people into one undifferentiated category. Condescending; does not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People with disabilities</li><li>• Deaf people*</li><li>• People who are blind</li><li>• People with autism</li></ul> |
| Handicapped  | Outdated; connotes that people with disabilities need charity. Disabilities don't handicap: Attitudes and architecture handicap.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People with disabilities</li></ul>  |



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|--|--|--|
| Admits she/he has a disability   | Disability is not something people have to “admit” to or needs to be disclosed.  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Says she/he has a disability</li> </ul> |
| Normal, healthy, whole (when speaking about people without disabilities as compared to people with disabilities) | People with disabilities may also be normal, healthy, and whole. This implies that a person with a disability is not normal. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Person without a disability</li> </ul>  |
| Courageous   | Implies the person has courage because of having a disability  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful, productive</li> </ul>       |

\* All currently accepted terms should be used with “people-first” language, i.e., “people with....” The exception to this are the terms “deaf people” and “deaf community,” which are fine.

Adapted from material developed by Mid-Hudson Library System Outreach Services Department, 103 Market Street, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601, 914/471-6006.