

WORDS THAT FOCUS ON DIGNITY:

Since our language is an extension of our attitude, words that we use can inadvertently create unnecessary and sometimes hurtful barriers. There are many old and incorrect stereotypes associated with “disability” and many of the terms used to describe it reflect “negativity” and “wrong-ness”. Therefore, it is very important to use positive terminology when speaking with or writing about persons with disabilities. The vocabulary list below was prepared to help improve communication between persons with and without disabilities. Using positive language can be an important first step toward improving the accessibility, of making all feel “welcome” at your facility. Feel free to make copies of this list and distribute it to co-workers.

AVOID

The following words have very strong **negative connotations** because they focus on what a person cannot do:

- Handicap, Handicapped
- Crippled, Crippled with ...
- Spastic, Crazy, Retarded
- Patient (*unless used in a hospital setting*)
- Invalid, Victim
- Paralytic
- Stricken with ...

PREFERRED

The following words are more **affirmative** and reflect a more **positive attitude** by focusing on each individual as **a person first**.

- Physically disabled, Cognitively Disabled
- Individual/Person living with ... a disability, a cognitive disability, a learning disability, etc.
- Individual/Person who has or is living with ... multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, a speech impairment, polio, etc.
- Individual/Person who is ... blind, visually impaired, etc.
- Paraplegic, Tetraplegic

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- Birth defect
 - Inflicted, Afflicted, Afflicted by/with ...
 - Incapacitated, Poor unfortunate

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- Caused by ..., Born with ...
 - Disabled since birth

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- Deaf and dumb
 - Deaf mute

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- Deaf person/individual
 - Pre-lingually deaf (*deaf at birth*)
 - Post-lingually deaf (*deaf after birth*)
 - Deaf/profoundly deaf (*no hearing capability*)
 - Hearing impaired (*some hearing capability*)

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- Confined to a wheelchair
 - Restricted to a wheelchair
 - Wheelchair bound

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- Person/Individual who uses a wheelchair
 - Wheelchair User
 - Person/Individual who walks with crutches.
Explanation: Wheelchairs, walkers and crutches are mobility aids. Without the use of these mobility aids, the person/individual is restricted from participation in their community.

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- Normal (*acceptable only for quoting statistics*)

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- Non-disabled (*referring to non-disabled persons/individuals as normal insinuates that disabled persons/individuals are not normal; are abnormal*)

The Ability Center of Greater Toledo

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OUR MISSION: to assist people with disabilities to live, work and socialize within a fully accessible community.

OUR VISION: We believe in and support equitable and inclusive communities for people living with disabilities.