



Words That Focus On Dignity

The words that we use can inadvertently create barriers since our language is an extension of our attitude. It is very important to use positive terminology when speaking with or writing about people with disabilities. This vocabulary list was prepared to help improve communication between individuals with and without disabilities. Using positive language can be an important component in improving the accessibility of your facility and making consumers with disabilities feel welcome in your programs. You are encouraged to make copies of this list and distribute it to co-workers.

AVOID

These words have strong negative connotations because they focus on what a person cannot do.

Do not use:

handicapped/handicap
cripple, crippled by
victim
spastic
patient (except when referring to someone actually in the hospital)
invalid
stricken with/suffers from
crazy, manic, insane
retard, retarded, idiot
imbecile, feeble-minded
birth defect
poor, unfortunate
afflicted/afflicted by
wheelchair victim
wheelchair bound
confined to a wheelchair
The blind
sightless
Deaf and dumb, deaf-mute
normal, regular person

PREFERRED

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

We suggest instead:

person with a disability
individual with a disability
person with multiple sclerosis (M.S.)
person with cerebral palsy (C.P.)
person who had polio
learning difficulty/learning disability
person with an emotional disability
person with an intellectual disability
caused by " ____ "
born with " ____ "
physical disability
mobility impaired
wheelchair user
visually impaired
visual disability
Deaf, Hard of Hearing
Nondisabled