National Service Inclusion Project:

Fact Sheet

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.

Outdated or Offensive	Reason(s)	Currently Accepted
"The" anything: The blind The disabled 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.	• People with disabilities • Deaf people* • People who are blind • People with autism
Handicapped	Outdated; connotes that people with disabilities need charity. Disabilities don't handicap: Attitudes and architecture handicap.	• People with disabilities

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Admits she/he has a disability	Disability is not something people have to "admit" to or needs to be disclosed.	• Says she/he has a disability
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.	• Person without a disability
Courageous	Implies the person has courage because of having a disability	• Successful, productive

* 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.

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