

Language is powerful!

It reflects, reinforces, and shapes our perceptions of people. Words which reflect positive attitudes and awareness help develop positive communications.

Words about disability have been strongly influenced by legal, medical, and political terms. As a result, our daily language is filled with technical terms which often do not convey our intended social message.

The suggestions made in this brochure are intended as a guide to improve language usage. Most suggestions are just common sense; others are a matter of becoming aware of appropriate, current terminology.

Each of us can

- **Educate**
- **Inform**
- **Politely correct** inaccurate use of language.
- **Encourage** a societal attitude where only positive, accurate words are acceptable in the context of any conversation.

Language should accurately portray an individual or a situation. It should emphasize the person rather than the disability.

Examples of good and bad language:

Don't say:

Dr. Lee is a crippled professor and is confined to a wheelchair. All of his students are normal.

Say instead:

Dr. Lee is a professor with a disability. He uses a wheelchair, which enables him to be mobile and independent. All of his students do not have disabilities.

Don't say:

The community is sponsoring a class for the retarded and the mentally ill.

Say instead:

The community is sponsoring a class for people with intellectual disabilities and people with mental illness.

Don't say:

We just hired a deaf mute to work in our office. He talks with his hands.

Say instead:

We just hired a man to work in our office who is deaf and uses sign language.

Some **inaccurate terms** and expressions have negative, derogatory connotations. Avoid using them and discourage use by others.

- afflicted
- crazy, insane
- cripple, cripp
- deaf and dumb / deaf mute
- defective / deformed
- handicapped
- retard
- spastic, spaz
- confined to a wheelchair
- invalid / wheelchair bound
- victim

Some currently **preferred terms** and expressions that reflect a positive attitude:

Person who is ...

- blind,
- deaf, hard of hearing
- or visually impaired

Person with ...

- cerebral palsy
- a developmental disability
- disabilities
- emotional disabilities
- intellectual disabilities
- a mobility impairment
- physical disabilities
- paralysis

Person who uses ...

- a wheelchair



Using the right words can make a dramatic difference!

For more information, please contact

**Institute on Disabilities
at Temple University**
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fax 215.204.6336
<http://disabilities.temple.edu>

This brochure is available in alternate formats, upon request.

Suggested additional resources on People First:

- **People First**, a free pamphlet
“... intended to increase awareness of appropriate ways to address and refer to individual with disabilities” published by Philadelphia Office of Housing and Community Development’s Housing and Disability Technical Assistance Program, available at www.newsontap.org or contact Technical Assistance Program
6 South Easton Road
Glenside, PA 19038
tel. 215.576.1150, ext.4
- **Disability Etiquette**, a free booklet published by United Spinal Association
“for anyone-with or without a disability who wants to interact more effectively with people with disabilities,” available at www.unitedspinal.org or contact United Spinal Association
Regional Office
5000 Wissahickon Avenue
Box 42938
Philadelphia, PA 19101
tel. 800.807.0190

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People First

A Language Guide

prepared by



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