What is People First Language?

People First language promotes understanding, respect, dignity and a positive view of people with disabilities. People First language puts the person first in thought and word, and emphasizes abilities, not limitations.

Why should you use People First Language?

People with disabilities are, first and foremost, people—people who have individual abilities, interests and needs. About 49 million Americans—one out of every five individuals—have some type of disability. Their contributions enrich our communities and society as they live, work and participate alongside us.

Every individual—regardless of sex, age, race or ability—deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. As part of efforts to eliminate discrimination and segregation, it is important to use language that demonstrates respect for all people.

Ten Commandments of Communicating with People with Disabilities

1. Speak directly to the person, rather than to a companion or interpreter, and use a normal tone of voice.
2. Offer to shake hands when introduced.
3. Always identify yourself and anyone with you when meeting someone with a visual disability.
4. If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted.
5. Treat adults as adults.
6. Do not lean against or hang on someone’s wheelchair.
7. Listen attentively. If you have difficulty understanding something a person says, ask for clarification.
8. Place yourself at eye level when speaking with someone seated or in a wheelchair.
9. To get the attention of a person who has a hearing disability, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand.
10. Relax.
Examples of Appropriate People First Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SAY:</th>
<th>INSTEAD OF:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person with a disability</td>
<td>Disabled person, handicapped person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person with a Cognitive Disability</td>
<td>Mentally retarded person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person who is deaf, person with a hearing impairment</td>
<td>Deaf, deaf-mute, deaf and dumb person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person who is blind; person with a vision impairment</td>
<td>Blind person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person who uses a wheelchair</td>
<td>Person confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible Room/ Entrance/Parking</td>
<td>Handicapped Parking/ Room/Entrance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person with Mental Illness</td>
<td>Mentally ill person, Schizophrenic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person with a physical disability</td>
<td>Crippled, lame, handicapped person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person with a brain injury</td>
<td>Brain damaged person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person without disabilities</td>
<td>Normal person, healthy person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person who needs/uses...</td>
<td>Person with special needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

People First Language Guidelines

- Recognize that people with disabilities are ordinary people with goals and interests just like everyone else.
- Avoid describing people with disabilities as groups, as in: the disabled, the deaf, the blind. Use People First language to tell what a person HAS, not what a person IS.
- Avoid negative words that imply tragedy, such as afflicted with, suffers from, or victim of.
- Do not use the term special as a euphemism or to indicate difference. For example, don’t say: special school, special bus, special needs or a special person.
- Avoid cute euphemisms such as physically challenged, inconvenienced or differently-abled.
- Recognize that a disability is not a challenge to be overcome. Don't say “he/she succeeded in spite of a disability.” Ordinary activities and accomplishments do not become extraordinary just because they are done by a person with a disability.
- Use handicap to refer to a barrier created by people or the environment. Use disability to indicate a person's functional limitation that interferes with that person's mental, physical or sensory abilities. For example, people with disabilities who use wheelchairs are handicapped by stairs.
- Do not refer to a person as bound to or confined to a wheelchair. Instead, say a person uses a wheelchair. Wheelchairs and other assistive devices are liberating to people with disabilities, not restrictive.

When Speaking to a Person with a Disability:

- Speak directly to the individual rather than to a companion or interpreter.
- Presume Competence. Treat adults as adults. Do not assume a person with a disability is of below average intelligence or needs to be spoken down to. Do not be patronizing or condescending.
- Listen attentively and wait for the person to finish, even if you do not understand something the person says. Never pretend to understand—instead ask the person to clarify or repeat the parts you missed.
- Place yourself at eye-level with the person you are speaking to.
- Use a normal tone of voice just as you would use when speaking with anyone else. Do not raise your voice or speak as though talking to a child.