

Disability Language Guide

Certain words and euphemisms are considered condescending and offensive by the disability community and should be avoided whenever possible. This language guide can help you to choose accurate and respectful words instead.

Learn about other ways you can reduce the stigma tied to disability at stopspecial.org.



PREFERRED	AVOID
accessible parking/ accommodations	handicapped accessible
child/student with disabilities, disabled	special, special needs
individual without a disability	able-bodied, normal, whole
individual with a physical disability, disabled	crippled, lame, handicapped, deformed; defective, differently abled, handicapable, special needs
individual with a spinal cord injury or disability, disabled	quadriplegic, paraplegic, incapacitated
individual with or who has (e.g., multiple sclerosis, HIV, cerebral palsy, mental illness, stroke etc...)	suffers from, victim of (e.g., multiple sclerosis, HIV, cerebral palsy, mental illness, stroke etc...)
individual who uses a wheelchair	wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair
blind or has low vision, vision impaired	visually impaired
deaf or hard of hearing	deaf and dumb, deaf-mute
individual of short stature, little person	dwarf or midget
individual with a cleft lip or cleft palate	hare lip
individual with epilepsy or a seizure disorder	Epileptic, spastic, person who has "fits" or "attacks"



PREFERRED	AVOID
individual with a learning disability	slow learner, special needs, r-word, stupid
individual with an intellectual or developmental disability, disabled	slow, special needs, r-word, stupid, dim-witted
individual with dyslexia, dyslexic	slow, special needs, r-word, stupid
individual with a psychiatric disability, with a mental health diagnosis, mental illness, or mentally ill	crazy, maniac, lunatic, demented, schizo, psycho, feeble-minded, deranged, spaz, mad, nuts, insane
individual with autism or autistic	special needs, r-word, stupid
assistance animal, service dog	Seeing-eye dog (refers only to a service dog specifically trained to assist an individual who is blind or has low vision)
Down syndrome or Trisomy 21	Down's syndrome, Downs, special needs, r-word

The above material is adapted from *Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities* by the Research and Training Center on Independent Living at The University of Kansas and the National Disability Rights Network's *Words Matter - Guidelines for Reporting and Writing About People with Disabilities*. For more information visit rtcil.org or ndrn.org.