

# Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities

## Choosing the Right Words



### Words Matter

When writing a news story, the proper terminology to refer to individuals who receive services from the MCBDD are **program participants, individuals with disabilities, or individuals**. These are all appropriate titles to use. *Note: The terms "client" and "consumer" are outdated and we try to avoid using them.*

The field of developmental disabilities tends to use many acronyms, abbreviations and jargon for many of the services and supports provided. Here are some sources that may help the media understand these items when writing or broadcasting information about our agency.

The following guidelines are suggestions for using language in a more sensitive manner that avoids reducing individuals to a series of labels, symptoms, or medical terms. Advocating for media representatives to be aware of how they use language regarding individuals with disabilities and their families does not suppress freedom of speech. Rather, these suggestions are intended to guide media representatives about how words really do make a difference.

### The Importance of Putting People First

Media representatives know how important it is to use language carefully. When communicating about individuals, it is good practice to avoid putting a label or condition prior to an individual's name or title. Many subjects that are reported about already use person-first language. Think of all the times you have read or heard something similar to the following examples:

*Susan, who was diagnosed with cancer two years ago, is now in remission.*

*Jim experiences memory problems as a result of brain damage caused by a car accident.*

*Jenny has fibromyalgia, a condition that causes symptoms such as muscle spasms, pain, weakness and fatigue.*

When it comes to reporting about individuals with disabilities and their families, however, it is still far too common to place the disability before the person. A phrase such as **"Jim is a retarded 48-year-old"** is an example of how some communicators still place a disability prior to an individual. Stated simply, person-first language places an individual *prior to* her or his disability. For example, if Judy has a visual impairment or is blind, you would place Judy first in the sentence even if the story directly deals with her impairment: **"Kate and Will's daughter, Judy, is an 18-year-old soccer player who experiences visual impairment."**

The following list depicts phrases and terms that are appropriate, given our understanding of person-first language as well as terms and phrases to avoid using:

#### Preferred:

accessible parking  
children with disabilities  
nondisabled  
individual with a disability  
individual with epilepsy  
individual with a learning disorder  
individual with multiple sclerosis (MS)  
individual who is blind/visually impaired  
individual who is deaf/hard of hearing  
individual who uses a wheelchair  
stroke survivor  
individual with dyslexia/autism/etc.

#### Avoid:

handicapped accessible  
special children  
able-bodied  
crippled, physically challenged, handicapped  
epileptic  
slow learner, retarded  
person who "suffers from" MS  
the blind  
the deaf  
wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair  
"suffered from" a stroke  
dyslexic/autistic/etc.

# Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities

## Choosing the Right Words



**able-bodied:** The term *able-bodied* should be **avoided** and is not accurate to describe a person who does not have a disability. Accessible environments and adaptive equipment allow many individuals with disabilities to be able-bodied. Use the term non-disabled or the phrase does not experience a disability when it is necessary to distinguish that a person does not have a disability. Avoid using the term able-bodied.

**accessible, accessibility:** Use *accessible* when describing a space, location or event that is modified to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Accessible modifications allow unrestricted admittance to accommodate individuals who may or may not use a wheelchair as a result of mobility impairments as well as individuals who may have sensory impairments. The term *accessibility* also includes modifications for individuals who communicate in different languages, have hearing or vision impairments, and other cognitive and learning disabilities.

**ADA:** Americans with Disabilities Act.

**autism:** Autism is a mental disorder characterized by indicators such as significant language dysfunction, withdrawal from reality, difficulty interacting socially, and repetitive behavior. Use the phrase *individual with autism*. **Avoid** the term *autistic*.

**deinstitutionalization:** A movement that strives to relocate individuals with disabilities from segregated institutional environments to supportive and inclusive community settings.

**disability:** A term used to define restriction(s) that complicate an individual's ability to perform activities or have experiences considered to be typical among individuals who do not experience a disability. Such restrictions may be permanent or temporary, and may fluctuate depending upon the disability and the resources available.

**Down syndrome:** **Not** Down's syndrome.

**inclusion:** A term that implies that all individuals with a disability, regardless of their ability, are part of typical classrooms, schools, local and world communities. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its 1997 amendments make it clear that schools have a duty to educate children with disabilities in general education classrooms.

**person-first language:** Person-first language seeks to avoid reducing people to a set of labels. When writing about disability or health-related issues, this effort avoids placing a disability or condition before an individual. We are all people first, no matter what labels we have acquired.

**regular education initiative:** A term used to describe the movement from segregated learning environments to educational settings that encourage collaborative and inclusive relationships between general and special education programs.

**Seeing Eye Dog:** A trademark for a guide dog trained by Seeing Eye Inc. of Morristown, N.J. Use *personal assistance animal, companion animal, or service animal*.

**special education:** Educational services including instruction, as well as related services such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, psychology, and speech and language therapy that are designed to ensure students with disabilities receive the supports and services needed to meet educational goals.

**wheelchair:** **Avoid** the phrases *confined to a wheelchair* or *wheelchair-bound*. Instead, use phrases such as *person who uses a wheelchair* and other person-first configurations.



# ALPHABET SOUP

Need help wading through the alphabet soup that is often dished out in the DD (developmental disabilities) field? This mini-dictionary will help. Goodness knows, we couldn't include them all, but we've done our best to explain some of the soup's ingredients.

<b>ABA</b>	Applied Behavior Analysis	<b>HCBS</b>	Home and Community Based Services	<b>PBA</b>	Positive Behavior Support
<b>ADA</b>	Americans with Disabilities Act	<b>HIPAA</b>	Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act	<b>PCA</b>	Personal Care Assistant
<b>ADAMH</b>	Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health Board	<b>HMG</b>	Help Me Grow	<b>PAGE</b>	Parent Advisory Group and Education
<b>ADD</b>	Attention Deficit Disorder	<b>HPC</b>	Homemaker Personal Care	<b>PAR</b>	Professional Advocates Resources
<b>ADHD</b>	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	<b>ICFDD</b>	Intermediate Care Facility for Developmental Disabilities	<b>PT</b>	Physical Therapy
<b>APE</b>	Adapted Physical Education	<b>IDEA</b>	Individuals with Disabilities Act	<b>QA</b>	Quality Assurance
<b>APSI</b>	Advocacy & Protective Services, Inc.	<b>IEP</b>	Individualized Education Plan	<b>QIDP</b>	Qualified Intellectual Developmental Professional
<b>ARC</b>	SHC, The Arc of Medina County	<b>IFSP</b>	Individual Family Service Plan	<b>QSRT</b>	Quality Service Review Tool
<b>CARF</b>	Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities	<b>ISO</b>	Innovative Support Options	<b>Rx</b>	Prescription
<b>CI</b>	Community Integration	<b>IO</b>	Individual Options Waiver	<b>SED</b>	Severe Emotional Disturbance
<b>CMS</b>	Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services	<b>ISP</b>	Individual Service Plan	<b>SIB</b>	Self-Injurious Behavior
<b>COEDI</b>	Children's Ohio Eligibility Determination Instrument	<b>LEA</b>	Local Education Agency	<b>SL</b>	Supported Living
<b>COG</b>	Council of Governments	<b>LRE</b>	Least Restrictive Environment	<b>SLP</b>	Speech Language Pathologist
<b>CP</b>	Cerebral Palsy	<b>MCBDD</b>	Medina County Board of Developmental Disabilities	<b>SO</b>	Special Olympics
<b>DD</b>	Developmental Disabilities	<b>MFE</b>	Multi-Factored Evaluation	<b>SPLG</b>	Strategic Planning Leadership Group
<b>DDC</b>	Developmental Disabilities Council	<b>MUI</b>	Major Unusual Incident	<b>SSA</b>	Service and Support Administration
<b>DOA</b>	Date of Admission	<b>OAC</b>	Ohio Administrative Code	<b>STEP</b>	Stepping To Employment Possibilities
<b>DODD</b>	Ohio Department of DD	<b>OACBDD</b>	Ohio Association of County Boards of DD	<b>TBI</b>	Traumatic Brain Injury
<b>DOE</b>	Department of Education	<b>ODE</b>	Ohio Department of Education	<b>TCM</b>	Targeted Case Management
<b>DOJ</b>	Department of Justice	<b>ODJFS</b>	Ohio Department of Job and Family Services	<b>UI</b>	Unusual Incident
<b>DRO</b>	Disability Rights Ohio	<b>OHT</b>	Office of Health Transformation	<b>UIR</b>	Unusual Incident Report
<b>Dx</b>	Diagnosis	<b>OEDI</b>	Ohio Eligibility Determination Instrument		
<b>EI</b>	Early Intervention	<b>OOD</b>	Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities		
<b>ETR</b>	Evaluation Team Report	<b>ORC</b>	Ohio Revised Code		
<b>FAC</b>	Family Advisory Council	<b>OT</b>	Occupational Therapy		
<b>FAPE</b>	Free Appropriate Public Education				
<b>FERPA</b>	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act				
<b>FSS</b>	Family Support Services				