

# - Words Matter -



## Person First Language

Do the words used to describe you have an impact on your life? You bet! Contrary to the age-old “sticks and stones” lesson we learned as children, words do matter! They can raise or lower expectations; hurt or help; and so much more.

Did you know that the first way to devalue someone is through language, by using words or labels to identify a person/group as “less-than,” or not like us? Once a person or group has been identified this way, it makes it easier to justify prejudice and discrimination. Our language shapes our attitudes; our attitudes shape our language; they’re intertwined. And our attitudes and language drive our actions.

Using **People First Language** - putting the person before the disability - and eliminating old, prejudicial, and hurtful descriptions, can move us in a new direction. **People First Language** is not political correctness; instead, it demonstrates good manners, respect, the Golden Rule, and more. It can change the way we see a person, and it can change the way a person sees them self. **People First Language** represents a more respectful, accurate ways of communicating. People with different abilities are not their diagnoses or disabilities; they are **PEOPLE FIRST**.

So let’s put People First Language into action. Remember, when communicating about people, the best practice is to avoid putting a label or condition prior to a person’s name or title.

- Do not refer to a person’s abilities unless it is relevant...  
*Examples: “Susan, who was diagnosed with cancer two years ago, is now in remission,” or “Jenny has fibromyalgia, a condition that causes symptoms like muscle spasms and fatigue.”*
- Use disability rather than “handicap” to refer to a person’s abilities.
- Avoid negative or sensational descriptions of a person’s abilities.  
*Examples: “Jim suffers daily from severe epilepsy,” rather say “Jim, a person with epilepsy, takes time each day to address his needs.”*
- Don’t use “normal” to describe people without disabilities; instead say people without disabilities or typical, if comparisons are necessary.
- Don’t portray people with disabilities as overly courageous, brave, special, or super human.  
*Example: “Autistic children bravely face enormous challenges each day.” instead try “Children with autism spends their days working on their abilities.”*

## WORDS THAT WORK AND THOSE THAT DON'T

When referring to a person’s disability, use people first language. Here is a list of phrases and terms that are appropriate when using person-first language as well as some terms and phrases to avoid.

### Preferred

individual with a different abilities  
non-disabled  
individual with different abilities  
individual with epilepsy  
individual who has autism  
individual with learning challenges  
individual who is visually impaired  
individual who is deaf/hearing impaired  
individual who uses a wheelchair  
individual of short stature  
stroke survivor  
individual with dyslexia

### Avoid

handicapped accessible  
special children  
crippled  
autistic  
physically challenged  
handicapped  
epileptic  
slow learner  
the blind/the deaf  
wheelchair-bound  
confined to a wheelchair  
dwarf or midget  
emotionally disturbed  
suffered from a stroke  
dyslexic  
birth defect

# - Opening Doors -

## Communication Styles

How you begin a conversation can make all the difference in making those around you feel respected. Positive words can open the door for the exchange of important information and sharing of many points of view.

Being a good communicator is an important skill, it can impact not only your life but those around you. An important question to ask yourself is, "Do you want those around you to feel valued and more encouraged to share their ideas and opinions with you?"

When communicated with those around you, use language which promotes respect and encourages more interaction rather than less.

## FACILITATING STATEMENTS

These statements open the door for better communication because they treat others as equals in the conversation.

- I'm wondering what you think about...
- I'm curious about your ideas/feelings...
- I'd like to hear what you think/believe to be the case.
- I'd like to hear what your ideas are.
- I have some ideas about \_\_\_\_\_. If you'd like to hear them, let me know.
- I remember an idea that \_\_\_\_\_ used, if you'd like to hear it.
- I appreciate hearing your opinion/ideas/feelings. I know about some other opinions that differ from yours, if you'd like to hear those.
- If I can be of assistance in this situation, let me know.
- I'm going to need to do some checking. I need more information.
- I'm wondering what your thoughts are on this.
- I could tell you what I would do in that situation, if you're interested.
- I'm wondering if you can think of someone who could help with this situation.
- I'm wondering if you see this situation as one in which you need help.
- I'm wondering if you want some help with this.
- What kind of help do you think you need?
- What would be helpful...?

## CONTROLLING STATEMENTS

These statements do not create a sense of open communication and when used with others it makes them feel as if they are a subordinate or less than equal.

- I'm not sure you're ready for...
- You need to do it like this.
- I can't let you...
- That's not right.
- I told you...
- You don't understand.
- Don't say I didn't warn you...
- The best/easiest way is \_\_\_\_\_.
- How can I get you to do \_\_\_\_\_?
- You just had to do that, didn't you?
- You need to...
- You should...
- You can't/shouldn't...
- Take my advice...
- I'll show you how, and then you do it.
- I know best, from experience.
- Don't do it like that.
- You have to...
- Try harder...
- I wish you would (wouldn't)...
- Here, let me help you with that.



# - Invisible Disability -



## What is an Invisible Disability?

The truth is that there is no certain “look” for a disability; disabilities don’t all look the same, and not every disability is visible.

Invisible Disability is a term that refers to a spectrum of hidden disabilities, primarily neurological in nature, which are not immediately apparent when you look at someone. It is important to note that while you may not initially notice anything physically different about a person, invisible disabilities do impact day-to-day life and often do have physical symptoms.

It is estimated that about 10% of the world population has some type of disability and about 80% of disabilities are invisible to the naked eye. This means that every day you could be interacting with people with disabilities, without even knowing it.

***Examples of invisible disabilities include: ADD/ADHD; autism spectrum disorders; Ehler’s-Danlos Syndrome; epilepsy; learning disabilities; multiple sclerosis; and more.***

## Things NOT to Say to Someone with an Invisible Disability:

“But you look fine. You don’t look sick.”

“I never would’ve guessed - you seem so normal.”

“It’s all in your head. You’re imagining it.”

“Aren’t you feeling better yet?”

“You just need to change your diet/ get more sleep/exercise more/ meditate/think positive.”



# - 5 Great Ways -



## You Can Have a Conversation with a Person with a Developmental Disability

It is important for many reasons to include people with developmental disabilities in all areas of life in our community. One of the first things you can do is to simply have a conversation and get to know the people around you who have different abilities.

### 1) Introductions are important

When meeting a person with a disability, it is important to share your name, ask them theirs and offer to shake hands. Most people with disabilities prefer to be addressed directly, and may be insulted if you talk about them like they are not in the room. Treat them like their real age and speak to them the same way you would speak to their same-age peers. Treat adults as adults; do not call them kids. And remember, most people with disabilities have typical vocabularies, just speak normally.

### 2) Treat them the same way you would treat any other friend or acquaintance.

People with disabilities are ordinary people with hobbies, interests, opinions, and relationships. You do not need to treat them differently than anyone else. They love a good joke, tease, or challenge just like you do. Just be yourself and give them time to express themselves. Ask them their thoughts and allow them to answer at their own pace. Do not put words in their mouths. When you are talking with a person who has difficulty speaking, be patient and wait for the person to finish. If the conversation is struggling or they seem uninterested, find a topic they feel passionate about and let them tell you all about it.

### 3) Expect to get a lot of questions.

People with disabilities are very curious about what you may be doing and also just about you, but it is okay to draw boundaries too. Do not allow them to get away with bad behavior—just as you would not allow someone without a disability to behave badly. If the questions get too invasive, it's okay to say, "I'm not comfortable answering that." Otherwise, have fun and enjoy their candor but also be prepared for their bluntness. Sometimes people with developmental disabilities can be very honest.

### 4) If they don't want to talk, don't pressure them.

They may feel uncomfortable or scared simply communicating with new people. Respect their wishes. Depending on the disability, the person you are talking with could get frustrated, impatient, distracted, or even angry. Do not take these things personally. People with disabilities are still people who experience a full range of emotions. Just like everyone else, they know when you are tense and it stresses them. Just relax and enjoy your conversation.

### 5) Some people with disabilities have different body language

Remember that a person has no control over their disability. It is not uncommon for a person with autism to fidget and appear "zoned out" as they listen closely to someone speaking. Do not assume that someone is not listening just because of their body language.