

Respectful Language to Describe People with Disabilities

When it is necessary to describe people using characteristics about their disability, our words matter. Please keep in mind that the disability community is very diverse and some people prefer to portray themselves using different terms or phrases. This chart includes some examples of phrases that maintain dignity and respect.

Instead of	Write or say
What happened to you?	How should I describe your disability?
issues, problems	name of diagnosis, needs support with
is handicapped	has a disability
“the” handicapped	people with disabilities
wheelchair person, wheelchair bound	uses a wheelchair
handicapped parking, handicapped restrooms	accessible parking, accessible restrooms
crippled	has cerebral palsy (or other condition)
paraplegic, quadriplegic	has paraplegia or quadriplegia
gimp	amputee, has limb loss or limb difference
normal, differently-abled, able-bodied	people without disabilities, non-disabled
is a slow learner	has a developmental or learning disability
is mentally retarded	has an intellectual disability
special education students	students who receive special education services
low, high functioning special needs	needs high, medium, low support
brain damage	brain injury
dwarf, midget	little person
Down’s person	person with Down syndrome
deformed, deformity, birth defect	congenital disability, congenital condition
crazy, out of control	emotional disability, mental illness
burn victim	burn survivor