

It's the person first-then the disability

Since its beginning 22 years ago, PACER Center has produced many handouts for parents of children and young adults with disabilities and professionals. Some pieces have become mainstays of disability literature across the nation. "It's the Person First..." is one of those favorites. Recently updated by PACER staff it is one of PACER's most requested handouts and reprints.

What do you see first?

The wheelchair?
The physical problem?
The person?

If you saw a person in a wheelchair unable to get up the stairs into a building, would you say, "There is a handicapped person unable to find a ramp?" Or would you say, "There is a person with a disability who is handicapped by an inaccessible building?"

What is the proper way to speak to or about someone who has a disability?

Consider how you would introduce someone—Jane Doe—who doesn't have

a disability. You would give her name where she lives, what she does or what she is interested in: she likes swimming, or eating Mexican food, or watching movies.

Why say it differently for a person with a disability? Every person is made up of many characteristics—mental as well as physical. Few people want to be identified only by their ability to play tennis or by their love for fried onions.

In speaking or writing, remember that children or adults with disabilities are like everyone else—except they happen to have a disability. Therefore, here are a few tips for improving your language related to people with disabilities.

1. Speak of the person first, then the disability.
2. Emphasize abilities, not limitations.
3. Do not label people as part of a disability group. Don't say "the disabled." Instead, say "people with disabilities."
4. Don't give excessive praise or attention to people with disabilities; don't patronize them.
5. Choice and independence are important. Let the person do or speak for himself or herself as much as possible.
6. A *disability* is a functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability to walk, hear, talk, learn, etc. Use *handicap* to describe a situation or barrier imposed by society, the environment, or oneself.

Say...	instead of...	Say...	instead of...
child with a disability	<i>disabled or handicapped child</i>	has a physical disability	<i>crippled</i>
person with cerebral palsy	<i>CP or spastic</i>	congenital disability	<i>birth defect</i>
person who is deaf or hard of hearing	<i>deaf and dumb</i>	condition	<i>disease (unless it is a disease)</i>
person with mental impairment or retardation	<i>retarded or retard</i>	seizures	<i>fits or spells</i>
person with epilepsy or person with seizure disorder	<i>epileptic</i>	cleft lip	<i>hare lip</i>
person who has...	<i>afflicted, suffers from, or victim</i>		<i>lame</i>
without speech, nonverbal	<i>mute or dumb</i>	mobility impaired	<i>sickly</i>
developmental delay	<i>slow</i>	medically involved or has chronic illness	
emotional disorder or mental illness	<i>crazy, insane, or mentally ill</i>	paralyzed	<i>invalid or paralytic</i>
uses a wheelchair	<i>confined to a wheelchair</i>	has hemoplegia (paralysis of one side of the body)	<i>hemiplegic</i>
with Down syndrome	<i>Mongoloid or retard</i>	has quadriplegia (paralysis of both arms and legs)	<i>quadriplegic</i>
has a learning disability	<i>is learning disabled</i>	has paraplegia (loss of function in lower body)	<i>paraplegic</i>
nondisabled	<i>normal or healthy</i>	of short stature	<i>dwarf or midget</i>
		accessible parking	<i>handicapped parking</i>