What Do You Call People with Disabilities?

Men, women, boys, girls, students, mom, Sue's brother, Mr. Smith, Rosita, a neighbor, employer, coworker, customer, chef, teacher, scientist, athlete, adults, children, tourists, retirees, actors, comedians, musicians, blondes, brunettes, SCUBA divers, computer operators, individuals, members, leaders, people, voters, friends or any other word you would use for a person.

People First Language recognizes that individuals with disabilities are - first and foremost - people. It emphasizes each person's value, individuality, dignity and capabilities. The following examples provide guidance on what terms to use and which ones are inappropriate when talking or writing about people with disabilities.

**People First Language**

- people/individuals with disabilities
  - an adult who has a disability
  - a child with a disability
  - a person

- people/individuals without disabilities

- people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
  - he/she has a cognitive impairment
  - a person who has Down syndrome

- a person who has autism

- people with a mental illness
  - a person who has an emotional disability
  - with a psychiatric illness/disability

- a person who has a learning disability

- a person who is deaf
  - he/she has a hearing loss
  - a man/woman who is hard of hearing

- person who is deaf and cannot speak
  - who has a speech disorder
  - uses a communication device
  - uses synthetic speech

**Instead of Labels that Stereotype and Devalue**

- the handicapped
  - the disabled

- normal people/healthy individuals

- the mentally retarded; retarded people
  - he/she is retarded
  - the retarded

- moron, idiot, imbecile
  - he/she's a Downs kid; a Mongoloid; a Mongol

- autistic

- the mentally ill; the emotionally disturbed
  - is insane; crazy; demented; psycho
  - a maniac; lunatic

- he/she is learning disabled

- the deaf

- is deaf and dumb
  - mute
- a person who is **blind**
  - a person who has a visual impairment
  - man/woman who has low vision
  - the blind

- a person who has **epilepsy**
  - people with a seizure disorder
  - an epileptic
  - a victim of epilepsy

- a person who **uses a wheelchair**
  - people who have a mobility impairment
  - a person who walks with crutches
  - a person who is wheelchair bound
  - a person who is confined to a wheelchair
  - a cripple

- a person who has **quadriplegia**
  - people with paraplegia
  - a quadriplegic
  - the paraplegic

- he/she is of small or **short stature**
  - a dwarf or midget

- he/she has a **congenital disability**
  - he/she has a birth defect

- accessible **buses, bathrooms, etc.**
  - reserved **parking** for people with disabilities
  - handicapped buses, bathrooms, hotel rooms, etc.
  - handicapped parking