

WORD CHOICES

A LEXICON OF PREFERRED TERMS FOR DISABILITY ISSUES UPDATED APRIL 2002

INTRODUCTION

Words can influence and reinforce the public's perception of people with disabilities. They can create either a positive view of people with disabilities or an indifferent, negative depiction.

This lexicon of words and phrases is designed to help you choose language that is neither demeaning nor hurtful, and terms that are preferred by people with disabilities.

The lexicon continues to be updated to reflect changes in terminology and current thinking in disability issues. Readers may also wish to review "*A Way with Words*", the Human Resource Development Canada terminology guide available in English at: <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/hrib/sdd-dds/odi/content/odipub.shtml> and in French at: <http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/hrib/sdd-dds/odi/content/odipubx.shtml>. Readers may also wish to utilize the *Paths to Equal Opportunity* web site at: www.equalopportunity.on.ca. Simply enter keywords such as disability etiquette, sensitivity training, lexicon or terminology to access a variety of up to date resources about preferred terms for disability issues. In addition, readers may also benefit by reviewing the language and terms as outlined in Table E1 of the "*Customer Service Standard for Persons with Disabilities B480-02*" (2002) by the Canadian Standards Association.

For more information on specific disabilities, please contact the appropriate disability organization or groups listed in the phone book or through your local community information centre. Readers may also wish to review the *Directory of Disability Organizations in Canada* on the EnableLink web site at <http://www.enablelink.org>.

Lexicon:

There are some general hints that can help make your communication and interactions with or about people with all types of disabilities more successful:

1. The preferred terminology is "disability" or disabled, not "handicap" or "handicapped." Never use terms such as "retarded, dumb, psycho, moron" or "crippled"; they are very demeaning and disrespectful to people with disabilities.
2. Remember to put people first. It is proper to say "person with a disability", rather than "disabled person."
3. If you are unfamiliar with someone, or their disability, it is better to wait until they describe their situation to you than to make your own assumptions about them. Many types of disabilities have similar characteristics, and your assumptions may be wrong.

Instead of	Please use
Afflicted by cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.	Person who has cerebral palsy. Person who has multiple sclerosis, etc. Person with a disability.
Aged (the)	Seniors.
Autistic	A person with autism. A person who has autism.
Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity	A person who has a congenital disability. A person with a disability since birth.
Blind (the), visually impaired (the)	A person who is blind. A person with a visual impairment. A person with low vision.
Brain damaged	A person with a brain injury. A person with a head injury.
Confined to wheelchair, wheelchair bound	A person who uses a wheelchair. A wheelchair user.
Crazy, insane, lunatic, psycho, mental, mental patient, maniac, neurotic, psychotic, unsound mind, schizophrenic	A person with a mental health disability. A person who has depression. A person with schizophrenia.
Cripple, crippled, lame	A person with a disability, a person with a mobility impairment or, more specifically, a person who walks with crutches, a person who uses a walker, a person who uses a mobility aid, a person with arthritis, etc.
Deaf (the) , hearing impaired (the)	A person who is deaf (person with profound hearing loss who communicates using sign language.) A person who is deafened (deaf later in life.) A person who is hard of hearing (person with hearing loss who communicates primarily by speech.) A person with a hearing loss. When referring to the entire deaf population and their culture it is acceptable to use "the deaf."
Deaf and dumb, deaf mute	A person who is deaf without speech.
Deaf-Blind (the)	Person who is deaf-blind (person who has any combination of visual and auditory impairments.)
Differently Abled	Person with a disability.
Disabled (the)	People with disabilities.
Elderly (the)	Seniors, older adults.
Epileptic	Person who has epilepsy.
Fits, spells, attacks	Seizures.
Handicapped (the)	Person with a disability The term handicapped may be used when referring to an environmental or attitudinal barrier as in "a person who is handicapped by a set of stairs leading to the entrance."
Invalid	Person with a disability.

Mentally retarded, idiot, simple, retarded, feeble minded, imbecile	A person with an intellectual disability. A person with a developmental disability.
Midget, Dwarf	A person of short stature. A person who has a form of dwarfism. A little person. A person diagnosed with "Achondroplasia, SED, or what ever their specific diagnoses is", a form of dwarfism.
Mongoloid, Mongolism	Person with Down Syndrome. One can use this terminology only when it is directly relevant.
Normal	Person who is not disabled. Person who is able bodied. Specifically, a person who is sighted, a hearing person, a person who is ambulatory.
Patient	Person with a disability. The word patient may be used when referring to a relationship between and medical professional and a client.
Physically challenged	Person with a physical disability.
Spastic	Person who has muscle spasms.
Stutterer	A person with a speech impairment or impediment.
Victim of/suffers from/ stricken with cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.	Person who has cerebral palsy. Person who has multiple sclerosis, etc. Person with a disability.
Visually impaired (the)	A person with a visual impairment. A person with low vision.
Wheelchair bound, confined to wheelchair	A person who uses a wheelchair. A wheelchair user.