



The Ability Center

WORDS THAT FOCUS ON DIGNITY: The vocabulary list below was prepared to help improve communication between persons with and without disabilities. Using positive language can be an important first step toward improving the accessibility, of making all feel welcome.

AVOID The following words have very strong negative connotations because they focus on what a person cannot do:

- Handicap, Handicapped
- Crippled, Crippled with ...
- Spastic, Crazy, Retarded
- Patient (unless used in a hospital setting)
- Invalid, Victim
- Paralytic
- Stricken with ...
- Birth defect
- Inflicted, Afflicted, Afflicted by/with ...
- Incapacitated, Poor unfortunate
- Deaf and dumb
- Deaf mute
- Normal (acceptable only for quoting statistics)

PREFERRED The following words are more affirmative and reflect a more positive attitude by focusing on everyone as a person first.

- Physically disabled, Cognitively Disabled
- Individual/Person living with a disability, a cognitive disability, a learning disability,
- Individual/Person who has or is living with... multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, a speech impairment, polio, etc.
- Individual/Person who is blind, visually impaired, etc.
- Paraplegic, Tetraplegic
- Caused by
- Born with
- Disabled since birth
- Deaf person/individual
- Pre-lingually deaf (deaf at birth)
- Post-lingually deaf (deaf after birth)
- Deaf/profoundly deaf (no hearing capability)
- Hearing impaired (some hearing capability)
- Person/Individual who uses a wheelchair
- Wheelchair User
- Person/Individual who walks with crutches
- Non-disabled (referring to non-disabled persons/ individuals as normal insinuates that disabled persons/individuals are not normal; are abnormal)