

National Business & Disability Council is part of The Viscardi Center, a network of non-profit organizations that provides a lifespan of services:
Pre-K through High School Education (up to age 21) ★ Transition Services ★ Vocational Training ★ Career Counseling & Placement ★ Workforce Diversification Assistance

Words with Dignity and Disability Etiquette

Words with Dignity	Avoid these words
person with a disability/disabled	cripple/handicapped/handicap/invalid (literally, <i>invalid</i> means "not valid")
person who has/person with (e.g. person who has cerebral palsy)	victim/afflicted with (e.g. victim of cerebral palsy)
uses a wheelchair	restricted, confined to a wheelchair/wheelchair bound (the chair enables mobility. Without the chair, the person is confined to bed)
deaf/does not voice for themselves/nonvocal	deaf mute/deaf and dumb
disabled since birth/born with	birth defect
psychiatric history/psychiatric disability/emotional disorder/mental illness	crazy/insane/lunatic/mental patient/wacko
epilepsy/seizures	fits
learning disability/mental retardation/developmental delay/ADD/ADHD	slow/retard/lazy/stupid/underachiever

Other terms which should be avoided because they have negative connotations and tend to evoke pity and fear include

abnormal	handi-capable	moron	spastic
burden	incapacitated	palsied	stricken with
condition	imbecile	pathetic	suffer
deformed	maniac	physically challenged	tragedy
differently abled	maimed	pitiful	unfortunate
disfigured	madman	poor	victim

Preferred Terminology

blind (no visual capability)

legally blind/low vision (some visual capability)

hearing loss/hard of hearing (some hearing capability)

hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body)

paraplegia (loss of function in lower body only)

quadriplegia (paralysis of both arms and legs)

residual limb (post-amputation of a limb)

Disability Etiquette

Basic guidelines

- Make reference to the person first then the disability. Say "a person with a disability" rather than "a disabled person." However, the latter is acceptable in the interest of conserving print space or saving announcing time.
- The term "handicapped" comes from the image of a person standing on the corner with a cap in hand, begging for money. People with disabilities do not want to be the recipients of charity or pity. They want to participate equally with the rest of the community. 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.
- If the disability isn't germane to the story or conversation, don't mention it.
- Remember, a person who has a disability isn't necessarily chronically sick or unhealthy. He or she is often just disabled.
- A person is not a condition, so avoid describing a person as such. Don't present someone as "an epileptic" or "a post polio". Instead, say "a person with epilepsy" or "a person who has had polio."

Common courtesies

- Don't feel obligated to act as a caregiver to people with disabilities. Offer assistance, but **wait** until your offer is accepted **before** you help. Listen to any instructions the person may give.
- Leaning on a person's wheelchair is similar to leaning or hanging on a person. It is considered annoying and rude. The chair is a part of one's personal body space. Don't hang on it!
- Share the same social courtesies with people with disabilities that you would share with someone else. If you shake hands with people you meet, offer your hand to everyone you meet, regardless of disability. If the person is unable to shake your hand, he or she will tell you.
- When offering assistance to a person with a visual impairment, allow that person to take your arm.

This will enable you to guide, rather than propel or lead the person. Use specific directions, such as "left one-hundred feet" or "right two yards," when directing a person with a visual impairment.

- When planning events, which involve persons with disabilities, consider their needs before choosing a location. Even if people with disabilities will not attend, select an accessible spot. You wouldn't think of holding an event where other minorities could not attend, so don't exclude people with disabilities.

Conversation

When speaking about people with disabilities, emphasize achievements, abilities and individual qualities. Portray them as they are in real life: as parents, employees, business owners, etc.

When talking to a person who has a physical disability, speak directly to that person, not through a companion. For people who communicate through sign language, speak to them, not to the interpreter.

Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions such as "See ya later" or "Gotta run."

To get the attention of a person who has a hearing loss, tap them on the shoulder or wave. Look directly at the person and speak clearly, slowly and expressively to establish if they read lips. Not all people with hearing loss can read lips. Those who do rely on facial expressions and body language for understanding. Stay in the light and keep food, hands and other objects away from your mouth. Shouting won't help. Written notes will. Use an interpreter if possible.

When talking to a person who uses a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, place yourself at eye level with that person. This will spare both of you a sore neck.

When greeting a person with significant loss of vision, always identify yourself and others. For example say, "On my right is John Smith."

Tips:

- Remember to identify persons to whom you are speaking.
- Speak in a normal tone of voice and indicate when the conversation is over.
- Let them know when you move from one place to another.
- By using words with dignity, we encourage equality for everyone.
- Say person with a disability or disabled. Avoid words like cripple, handicapped, handicap, or invalid which literally means "not valid"
- Say person who has or person with, such as person who has cerebral palsy. Avoid saying victim or afflicted with, such as a victim of cerebral palsy.
- Say uses a wheelchair. Don't say restricted or confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair-bound. The chair enables mobility. Without the chair, the person is confined to bed.
- Say deaf, does not voice for himself or herself or non-vocal. Avoid deaf mute or deaf and dumb.
- Say disabled since birth or born with. Avoid saying birth defect.
- Say psychiatric history, psychiatric disability, emotional disorder or mental illness.
- Avoid words like crazy, insane, lunatic, mental patient or wacko.
- Use epilepsy or seizures. Do not say fits.
- Say learning disability, mental retardation, developmental delay, ADD or ADHD. Do not use words like slow, retard, lazy, stupid, or underachiever.

- Other terms which should be avoided because they have negative connotations and tend to evoke pity and fear include abnormal, burden, condition, deformed, differently abled, disfigured, handi-capable, incapacitated, imbecile, maniac, maimed, madman, moron, palsied, pathetic, physically challenged, pitiful, poor, spastic, stricken with, suffer, tragedy, unfortunate, or victim.
- The preferred terminology is blind (no visual capability), legally blind or low vision (some visual capability), hearing loss or hard of hearing (some hearing capability), hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body), paraplegia (loss of function in lower body only), quadriplegia (paralysis of both arms and legs), and residual limb (post-amputation of a limb).

Developed by Paraquad, Inc.
paraquad@paraquad.org