

People First Language
Style Guide

EVERYONE BELONGS
Respect
is the new "R" word
PEOPLE FIRST
ABILITY ACCEPTANCE

*A reference for media professionals
and anyone who uses words*



www.hamiltondds.org/cara/aim

What is People First Language?

“People First” Language (also referred to as “Person First”) is an accurate way of referring to a person with a disability in spoken or written word.

This style guide offers an alphabetical list of standard terms that focus on the person instead of the disability.

This is not a complete list, but is a general representation of terms that people with disabilities commonly find respectable.

Why People First Language?

Words and how they are used shape attitudes.

Incorporating People First Language into the written and spoken word demonstrates that people are unique and their abilities or disabilities are part of who they are, not a definition of who they are.

People First Language is sensitive and **accurate** and helps break down community barriers and foster mutual respect and open lines of communication and acceptance.

What is AIM?

Advocacy in Media (AIM) is a subcommittee of a non-profit organization called Community Ambassadors Resource Alliance (CARA.) CARA members are community partners associated with Hamilton County DD Services that work together to raise awareness and funds to enrich the lives of people with disabilities. The purpose of AIM is to promote People First Language in print, broadcast, and on-line media.

Appropriate Terminology

A

ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) involves learning and behavioral problems that do not have any serious underlying physical or mental causes and is characterized especially by difficulty in sustaining attention, impulsive behavior, and excessive activity.

DO USE: child with ADHD

DON'T USE: hyperactive

Autism is a mental disability originating in infancy that may be characterized by absorption in self-centered subjective mental activity, especially when accompanied by marked withdrawal from reality, inability to interact socially, repetitive behavior, and language dysfunction.

DO USE : child with autism, child who has autism, person living with autism

DON'T USE: autistic

B

Blindness occurs when a person has loss of vision for ordinary life purposes.

DO USE: person who is visually impaired, person with visual impairments, boy who is blind

DON'T USE: blind, the blind, blind person

Brain injury is a long-term or temporary disruption in brain function resulting from injury to the brain. Difficulties with cognitive, physical, emotional, and/or social functioning may occur.

DO USE: person who has a brain injury, woman who has sustained a brain injury, or boy with an acquired brain injury

DON'T USE: brain damaged, suffers from brain damage, victim of brain damage

D

Deafness is a profound hearing loss that results in development of language skills - often American Sign Language - that are different from those developed by individuals who have hearing.

DO USE: (ask the person who is being written or talked about)

DON'T USE: (ask the person who is being written or talked about)

Developmental disability is a mental or physical disability that occurs at birth or in infancy where one or more major life activities is limited indefinitely.

DO USE: individual with: a disability, autism, epilepsy, a brain injury, etc.

DON'T USE: retarded, disabled, handicapped, autistic, epileptic, brain damaged

Disability is a general term used for a functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability, for example, to walk, lift, hear, or learn, and may be physical, sensory, or mental.

DO USE: person with a disability

DON'T USE: handicapped, the mentally or physically disabled, special, retarded, mental retardation

Down syndrome describes a chromosomal irregularity that results in a delay in physical, intellectual and language development.

DO USE: person with Down syndrome

DON'T USE: Mongol, Mongoloid, Down's baby

L

Learning disability is anything permanent that affects the way a person takes in, retains and expresses information.

DO USE: child with a learning disability, child who has learning disability

DON'T USE: slow, slow learner, retarded

M

Mental retardation refers to some degree of intellectual delay, which can range from mild to profound depending on the cause. Individuals may live completely or partially independent with support.

**This term is no longer accepted and
SHOULD NOT BE USED.**

It is strictly related to medical diagnosis. However, it is expected to be removed as a diagnosis in 2012 by the American Psychiatric Association.

DON'T USE: retarded, slow, the retarded, abnormal

P

Post-polio syndrome is a condition that affects persons who have had poliomyelitis (polio) long after recovery from the disease

DO USE: person with post-polio syndrome

DON'T USE: polio victim

Psychiatric disability - psychotic, schizophrenic, neurotic, and other specific terms should be used **only** in proper clinical context and should be checked carefully for medical and legal accuracy.

DO USE: psychiatric disabilities, psychiatric illness, emotional disorders, mental disorders

DON'T USE: crazy, maniac, lunatic, demented, schizo, psycho

S

Seizure is an involuntary muscular contraction or a brief impairment or loss of consciousness resulting from something neurological like epilepsy, or from brain injury.

DO USE: person who has a seizure disorder, person who had a seizure

DON'T USE: fit, spastic, epileptic

Small/short stature describes people under 4'10" tall. Groups who focus on this issue are divided between using "little people" and "dwarfs", as some are offended by those terms, some are not.

DO USE: ask the person who is being written or talked about

DON'T USE: midget

Speech disorder is when a person has limited or difficult speech patterns.

DO USE: person who has a speech disorder

DON'T USE: mute, dumb

Spinal cord injury occurs when there has been permanent damage to the spinal cord. Quadriplegia is a substantial or significant loss of function in all four extremities. Paraplegia refers to substantial or significant loss of function in the lower part of the body only.

DO USE: person with a spinal cord injury, person who has quadriplegia or paraplegia

DON'T USE: quadriplegic, paraplegic

Stroke is caused by interruption of blood to the brain. Hemiplegia (paralysis of one side) may result.

DO USE: person who had a stroke

DON'T USE: stroke victim

Tips for Incorporating People First Language

Refer to the Quick Guide on the back page of this Style Guide for an overview of common words to use and avoid.

Different disability groups object to different phrases for varying reasons. Even among people with disabilities and their families, different terms are used and accepted.

It is best to ask the person you are speaking or writing about which words or phrases are acceptable to them personally.

When writing or speaking about people with disabilities, it is preferable to emphasize abilities rather than limitations, focusing on a person's accomplishments, creative talents or skills.

It is not preferable to avoid mentioning a person's disability or describing the impact it has had on the person's life. It is preferable to refer to the person and the disability he or she happens to have respectfully and accurately.

Removal of the term “mental retardation”

In 2009, new laws in Ohio removed the term “mental retardation” from official references in the names and business workings of public agencies. Ohio was the 45th state to officially remove the term that many people with disabilities find offensive.

The change had long been advocated for in Ohio by individuals with disabilities and their families. Ohio's legislators passed Senate Bill 79 in July 2009 and its companion house bill in June 2009 supporting the name change. Ohio Governor Strickland signed the bill into law effective October 2009.

Advocates are now pushing to change public use of the term, championing the phrase:

“Respect is the new R word!”

Please feel free to contact any of the following AIM members for additional information or resources

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Quick Reference Guide

DO USE

congenital disability -----
uses a wheelchair -----
has a disability -----
deaf, hard of hearing -----
Down syndrome -----
person of small (or short) stature -----
people with disabilities -----
person with epilepsy -----
individual with disabilities-----
brain injury -----
accessible parking -----
typical, typically developing -----
communicates with her eyes/device ---
physical disability-----

DON'T USE

birth defect
wheelchair bound
handicapped or disabled
hearing impaired
Mongol or Mongoloid, Downs
dwarf or midget
retarded, crippled, afflicted
epileptic
client, consumer
brain damaged
handicapped parking
normal or healthy
non-verbal
victim, afflicted, suffers from