

## Use Words with Dignity

### Basic Guidelines - Person First Language

Make reference to the person first, then the disability in most cases. For example: “A person with a disability” rather than a “disabled person”.

Words with Dignity	Do Not Use
The following are words that are affirmative and reflect a positive attitude. These are	The following words have strong negative connotations, please
Disability	Handicap
Person who has multiple sclerosis	Stricken with multiple sclerosis
Person with paraplegia (person with limited or no use of lower limbs)	Para
Person with quadriplegia (person with limited or no use of all four limbs)	Quad
Person who has cerebral palsy	Spastic
Person who has a speech disorder	Speech defect
Person with a head injury	The head injured
Person with HIV	HIV/AIDS victim
Person who has polio, has arthritis, etc.	Crippled with polio, arthritis, etc.
Person with an intellectual disability	Retard/Retarded
Person with a learning disability	Slow
Person with a mental health condition	Crazy, mentally ill
Person who walks with crutches, a walker, a cane, etc.	Crippled, lame
Person in/who uses a wheelchair	Confined/restricted to a wheelchair**
Blind Person or Low Vision	Visually impaired or partially blind*
Deaf Person	Deaf and dumb, deaf mute
Person who is hard of hearing or has a hearing loss	Hearing impaired*
Sign language interpreter	Deaf interpreter
Born with “_____”	Birth defect
Caused by “_____”	Afflicted by
Person without a disability	Normal (referring to a person without a disability as normal insinuates that persons with disabilities are not normal)

\*You may always ask a person how they would like you to refer to their disability

\*Many blind, Deaf or persons who are hard of hearing consider the words “visually impaired” or “hearing impaired” to be offensive. Blind means without the sense or use of sight. Deaf means unable to hear. They do not wish to be identified as diminished in strength or value as the word “impaired” denotes.

\*Wheelchairs, walkers, and crutches are mobility aids. Without the use of these mobility aids the person may be restricted from participation in their community. Assistive technology is a product or piece of equipment that is used to increase, maintain, or improve a person’s functional capabilities.

Office of Persons with Disabilities  
 Lucas State Office Building, Human Rights, Second Floor  
 Des Moines, IA 50319  
 888-219-0417 (V/TTY)  
<https://humanrights.iowa.gov/cas/pd>