

# A Final Word

The formula is simple — put the person before the disability and you get a positive perception.

This, people with disabilities will tell you, is the first step toward full acceptance as contributing members of society. It is one of the ways they can let their fellow citizens know that they are not broken — that for them, having a disability is a natural, not a selected, way of life.

People first language also prevents the tendency to reduce the person to the disability. When words alone define a person, the result is a label ... a label that almost always reinforces the barriers created by negative and stereotypical attitudes.

As a minority, people with disabilities know something most of us fail to recognize — what you see is not necessarily what you get. While people with disabilities and their advocates are working hard to end the very real discrimination and segregation in education, employment and participation in community activities, all of us must strive to eliminate the prejudicial language that creates barriers to inclusion in the mainstream of society.

**We cannot always control our thoughts,  
but we can control our words.**

Like paint on a canvas, words create a powerful image. The question is whether we want that image to be a straightforward, positive view of people with disabilities or an insensitive portrayal that reinforces common myths and is a form of discrimination.



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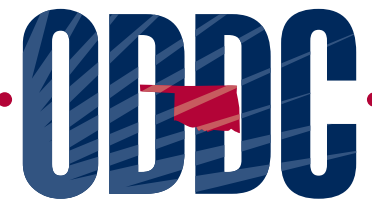


# WATCH YOUR WORDS



**THEY  
AFFECT  
OTHERS.**

OKLAHOMA DEVELOPMENTAL



DISABILITIES COUNCIL

# Words are the only things that last forever.

## People First Language

Following are examples of the dos and don'ts in the use of people first language.

People with disabilities know all too well that words create opportunities or build barriers. Man or woman, adult or child, it's something they've dealt with every day of their lives.

For too long, words have separated and isolated people with disabilities. They've heard them all – idiot, retard, handicapped, fragile, mentally weak, weird, deformed, moron, imbecile, cripple, mongoloid, spastic, feeble-minded, brain damaged – and on and on and on.

**Watch your thoughts for they become words.  
Choose your words for they become actions.**

Time after time people with disabilities have been identified not as a person, but as a problem. They've heard terms like “afflicted with,” “crippled by,” “suffers from,” and “a victim of.” They've been pitied or praised because of their “battle” to overcome their “handicap.” To paraphrase writer George Orwell, if thought corrupts language then language can corrupt thought. Put another way, the words we choose reflect our attitudes.



That's why people with disabilities prefer “people first language.” What, exactly, is people first language? Simply put, people first language uses words in a way that identifies the person before their so-called problem.

Put the person first when writing or speaking about people with disabilities! Stay away from labels like the blind, the deaf or the disabled. They do not reflect the individuality, equality or dignity of people with disabilities. So, with all this in mind, when referring to a person with a disability ...

### Say or write this ...

She is a person with a disability  
He is an individual without a disability  
They are children (kids) without disabilities  
He is a person with a cognitive disability  
She is an individual with autism  
He needs behavior supports  
She is a person with a learning disability  
He uses a wheelchair  
She has a physical disability  
He has a brain injury  
She has a congenital disability  
He is a person with mental retardation  
She is a person who is blind or visually impaired  
He is a person who is deaf or hard of hearing  
She is an individual with (or who has) multiple sclerosis or muscular dystrophy  
He is a person with cerebral palsy  
She is an individual with epilepsy  
He is a person with a psychiatric disability  
He is a person who uses an assistive speech device or is unable to speak

### Instead of this ...

She is handicapped or disabled  
He is able-bodied  
They are normal or healthy children (kids)  
He's retarded  
She's autistic  
He has behavior problems  
She's learning disabled  
He's confined to a wheelchair  
She's a quadriplegic or a cripple  
He's brain damaged  
She suffers from a birth defect  
He's a retard or mentally defective  
The blind  
He suffers a hearing loss or from being deaf  
  
She is afflicted by MS or MD  
He is a victim of CP  
She is an epileptic  
He is crazy, nuts, etc.  
  
He is dumb or a mute

