

TALKING ABOUT DISABILITY

Guide to Inclusive Communication

A disability is a physical or mental illness, injury, or condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities. Disabilities require the use of language that maintains the integrity of the individual as a person first (the person's name or pronoun should come first), and descriptions of the disability should not be used as an adjective modifying the person (e.g., "a man who has bipolar disorder" is acceptable use.)

General Principles for Reducing Bias about Disability

- *Disabilities* require the use of language that maintains the integrity and dignity of the individual
- Put the person first (e.g., "people with diabetes" or "Mary, who uses a screen reader")
- Whenever possible, ask the preferred terminology. One person with a visual disability may prefer "blind," while another person with a similar disability may prefer "person with low or limited loss of vision."

Specific Words to Avoid and Words to Use When Communicating About Disability

Avoid	Use
Addict, alcoholic	Someone with a drug addiction; recovering, or someone in recovery from alcoholism
Afflicted with, stricken with, suffers from, victim of	Neutral language that does not connote pity. For example: "She has muscular dystrophy."
Insane, mentally deranged, crazy, loony, mad, psycho	Use person-first language and a specific diagnosis when possible. For example: "He is living with bipolar disorder." If diagnosis is unknown, use mental illness or mental disorder.
Mentally retarded, mentally disabled as adjectives or collective nouns such as "the mentally disabled"	Person with a mental disability, or people with mental disabilities.
Dwarf, little person, midget	Short stature or someone with dwarfism

Five General Principles for Reducing Bias

- 1. When writing, speaking, or using images, aim to use examples that reflect a broad range of identities and perspectives.** Whenever possible, ask the preferred terminology. One person with a visual disability may prefer “blind,” while another person with a similar disability may prefer “person with low or limited loss of vision.”
- 2. Differences of any kind should only be mentioned when relevant.** Marital status, age, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic identity or the fact that a person has a disability should not be mentioned gratuitously.
- 3. Use the appropriate level of specificity.**
 - **Not specific:** Using the word “man” to represent humanity
 - **Specific:** More accurate would be using the phrase “men and women”
 - **Not specific:** At risk children
 - **Specific:** Children at risk for early school “dropout”
- 4. Be sensitive to labels.**
 - Avoid labeling people whenever possible.
 - If you must use a label, remember to call people what they prefer to be called, keeping in mind that these preferences can change over time. For example, rather than American Indian or Native American, many groups prefer to be referred to by their tribal name, for instance, “..., members of the Cherokee tribe.”
- 5. Put the person first.** For example, people with diabetes” or “Mary, who uses a screen reader.”

Common Language and Glossary Terms

Accessibility How easily a person with disabilities can negotiate a physical or virtual environment, for example, part of a building, a structure, or a website. Accessibility also refers to the design of structures, products, devices, services, or environments for people who experience disabilities.

Discrimination Occurs when a person, or a group of people, is treated less favorably than another person or group because of their background or certain perceived personal characteristics.

Diversity Diversity of thought, or cognitive diversity, is more than age, religion, gender, race, physical ability. It’s about how different point of views are accepted and valued.

Inclusion Seeking out, identifying, understanding, and removing barriers to full participation and belonging; intentionally including additional difference in a group or process; and encouraging high levels of both individuality and belonging.

Microaggression A comment or action that is subtly and often unintentionally hostile or demeaning to a member of a minority or marginalized group.

Privilege A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group, often implicitly and ‘invisibly’ to those who have it.

Trigger An experience which causes an individual, normally unintentionally and indirectly, to recall previous trauma.

Unconscious Bias Social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness.

Resources for Inclusive Language

This guide and guides on other topics of inclusive communication can be found at marketing-partners.com/guide-to-inclusive-language.