

What is People First language?

- People-first language (PFL) is a way of speaking and referring to people with disabilities that respects them as human beings, rather than dehumanizes them.
- It emphasizes the person first and their disability second.
- It also emphasizes the use of language that is objective rather than words that are subjective or have pejorative connotations.

Why Is It Important? **Language can be empowering**

- The order of the words to describe someone can convey priority or importance.
- PFL represents more respectful, accurate ways of communicating. People with disabilities are not their diagnoses or disabilities; they are people, first.
- And words can be loaded down with a stigma, as with the word “handicapped.” The word’s origin is in the phrase “hand in cap,” which is actually derived from a game of chance but sometimes mistakenly believed to involve the image of a beggar.
- **When we adopt new ways of thinking and talking about people with disabilities, we'll not only exert a positive influence on *their lives*, but on *our society as a whole*. We've seen the power of language on other groups; it is unacceptable to use ethnic slurs and other harmful descriptors.**

-- Kathie Snow

People First Language

- A person who is blind.
- A person who uses a wheelchair.
- A person with cerebral palsy.
- Even though the public might admire super achievers , portraying people with disabilities as superstars raise a false expectation that all people with disabilities should achieve at that level.
- Being brave or courageous... they are only coping with what they have to
- Their disability might have made it more difficult for them to achieve a goal but they are not “special” because they worked hard to overcome any limitations
- Not a person in a wheelchair or wheelchair bound-Not afflicted with, suffers from, victim of, or crippled by. Typically, people with disabilities would rather be known for the things that reflect on their character or their essence as human beings.
- They would rather be known as a devoted parent or a successful attorney or an amateur gourmet chef rather than as someone with a brace on their leg or someone who wears hearing aids.

- A person's disability is a part of their life, but it needn't be the predominant thing.
- Would we like to always be known as...the short one, the tall one, the one with one blue and one brown eye?????

If you are writing a story about people with disabilities:

- Do not focus on a disability unless it is crucial to a story
- Focus on the issues that affect the quality of life of people with disabilities: accessible transportation or housing, employment....
- Tear – jerking story doesn't always show a positive and competent image
- Avoid terms such *handicapable*, *differently-abled*, *special*, and *challenged*. They come off as cutesy and trivializing, and reinforce the idea that people cannot deal honestly with their disabilities.

EXAMPLES:

YES	NO
• people with disabilities	the handicapped or disabled
• people with AIDS	AIDS victims/AIDS patients
• Kate has (a diagnosis of) autism.	Kate is autistic.
• Bob has a mobility disability or impairment	Bob is a quadriplegic/cripple.
• Nora uses a wheelchair/is a wheelchair user	Nora is confined to a wheelchair/is wheelchair bound.
• Tom has a mental health condition. disturbed/mentally	Tom is emotionally ill/crazy.
• Children without disabilities.	normal/healthy/typical children
• Tonya has a developmental disability.	Tonya is retarded.
• Pedro has multiple sclerosis. MS; is an MS	Pedro is stricken/afflicted with victim.