

# PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

## To Communicate in Person-First Language:

### Put the person before the disability. For example:

- Jamal has a physical disability
- Ahmed uses a wheelchair
- Mei Ling has autism
- The woman who is using a cane needs assistance
- Several members of the audience are blind or have a visual impairment

### Avoid these words when talking about disability:

- Retard/retarded
- Handicapped
- Crippled
- Idiot
- Crazy
- Nut
- Disabled
- Deformed
- Abnormal
- Defective
- Confined to, bound by, suffers from, something wrong with, problem with

### ...And We Believe these Words Need to be Dropped from Our Society's Language:

- Handicapable
- Differently Abled
- Special Needs
- Special Education

### Use these Words and Phrases Instead:

- "Has a (physical, cognitive, mental health, intellectual) disability"
- "Is accessible"
- "Uses a wheelchair, cane, assistive technology, etc."

### Respectful Etiquette When Interacting with People with Disabilities:

1. Smile, look directly at and talk directly to, the person even if there is a companion with him or her.
2. Ask the person if s/he wants help and then let the person guide you if s/he does.
3. Talk as you normally would; don't shout or talk down (baby talk).
4. Slow down and be patient; the person may need more time to answer you or to think about choices.
5. If you don't understand the person, ask her or him to repeat the words or write them down.
6. Use hand gestures, pointing and body language to help communicate when needed.
7. If the person uses a wheelchair, cane, or other physical support, ask permission before touching or moving the support.
8. If you are busy with a task at work and you notice a customer with a disability waiting for assistance, acknowledge their presence and let them know you will be with them shortly.
9. Check that your business is in compliance with the American's with Disabilities Act. If not, make changes to comply. It's the law!
10. Hire people with disabilities to work or volunteer in your business.

## Activity:

*Using the phrase in the parentheses, change the following to "person-first" sentences:*

1. He's Handicapped. (Has a disability)
2. My sister is confined to a wheelchair. (Uses a wheelchair)
3. The boy next door is retarded. (Developmental disability)
4. Mark is brain damaged. (Brain injury)
5. She's crazy. (Mental illness/mental health disability or psychiatric disability)
6. Pull into that handicapped spot. (Physically accessible spot)
7. The autistic student in my son's class is a good reader. (Student with autism)
8. Disabled people want to be treated just like everybody else. (People with disabilities)