

STICKS AND STONES

LANGUAGE CHANGES !

Does our language stay the same? No! Actually, it's always changing. There are words we use all the time now that we didn't use a few years ago. Other words we now use in ways we didn't before. And there are words you heard a lot a few years ago that you don't hear much now.

Language that's used to describe people changes, too. It's important to keep up with these changes. When you use words that are meaningful, you speak with respect. What you say and write can add to someone's dignity or take it away. Remember the "sticks and stones" rhyme – "words can never hurt me"? Well, words (especially labels) CAN hurt when they aren't respectful.

Words about people with disabilities change from time to time. Some words and phrases don't recognize how capable people with disabilities are. They don't need or want to be pitied, so the language we use should avoid sounding like we feel sorry for them. They don't want to be thought of as "special" either, so our language should show that.

Here are some tips to help you make sure to use language that adds to people's dignity.

HANDICAP AND DISABILITY

"Handicap" and "disability" are not synonyms! **Disability** is a word for a condition that might affect someone's mobility, hearing, vision, speech, or thinking ability (such as paraplegia, deafness, AIDS). **Handicap** is a barrier that is environmental or attitudinal (such as no ramps or elevator, information not available in Braille, negative stereotypes). Most people prefer to be called disabled instead of handicapped.

PERSON FIRST

Refer to the person first, not the disability. For example, say "the person who uses a wheelchair" or "the wheelchair user" instead of "the wheelchair person". Don't call someone "the arthritic" because a person isn't his disability. However, some people with disabilities identify themselves as "blind person" or "Deaf person."

LANGUAGE ETIQUETTE

Common words and phrases are okay to use. For example, it's fine to say "see you later" to a blind person, or "want to go for a walk?" to someone who uses a wheelchair. When referring to people with disabilities, choose words that reflect dignity and respect, such as:

Language Not To Use	Appropriate language
the disabled, the blind, the deaf	people with disabilities, the disability community ("disabled" is an adjective, so must have a noun with it), the blind community, the Deaf community
crippled, suffers from, afflicted with, stricken with, victim of, invalid	has a disability, is a person with a disability, physically disabled, walks with a cane, uses leg braces
normal person, healthy, whole	non-disabled, person without disabilities, able-bodied
impaired, impairment	disabled, has a disability
hearing impaired, hearing impairment	deaf, hard of hearing, late-deafened
visually impaired, visual impairment	low vision, blind
wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair person	wheelchair user, person who uses a wheelchair
handicap parking, disabled parking	accessible parking, disability parking
dumb, mute	person who cannot speak, has difficulty speaking, uses synthetic speech, is non-vocal, non-verbal
stutterer, tongue-tied	person who has a speech or communication disability
CP victim, spastic	person with cerebral palsy
epileptic	person with epilepsy, person with seizure disorder
fit, attack	seizure, epileptic episode or event
crazy, lunatic, insane, nuts, deranged, psycho	people with emotional disorders, mental illness, mental disability, psychiatric disability
retard, mentally defective, moron, idiot, imbecile, Down's person, mongoloid	developmentally disabled, developmentally delayed, person with mental retardation, person with Down syndrome
slow learner, retarded	has a learning disability, person with specific learning disability
dwarf, midget	person of small stature, short stature; little person
paraplegic, quadriplegic	man with paraplegia, woman who is paralyzed, person with spinal cord injury
birth defect	congenital disability, disabled from birth