THE MISSING PAGES IN YOUR STYLE BOOK

People First Language

A GUIDE FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING ABOUT PEOPLE WHO LIVE WITH DISABILITIES

People First Language is a way of communicating that reflects respect for people with disabilities by choosing words that portray them accurately.

Emphasis is placed on the person **first**, rather than the disability.

The focus/subject is the **person**.

Example: "John is the writer who has a disability" rather than "John is a disabled writer."

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People First Language

A project of the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities

Distinction between Disability and Handicap++

A **Disability** is a condition caused by an accident, trauma, genetics or disease, which may limit a person's mobility, hearing, vision, speech or mental function. Some people with disabilities have more than one disability.

A **Handicap** is a physical or attitudinal constraint that is imposed upon a person, regardless of whether that person has a disability. Webster's defines handicap as "to put at a disadvantage."

Example: Some people with disabilities use wheelchairs. Stairs, narrow doorways and curbs are handicaps imposed upon people who use wheelchairs.

Tips for Reporting on People with Disabilities**

- **Do not focus on disability** unless it is crucial to a story. Focus instead on issues that affect the quality of life of those same individuals, such as accessible transportation, housing, affordable health care, employment opportunities, or discrimination.
- **Do not portray successful people with disabilities as superhuman.** This raises false expectations that all people with disabilities should be high achievers.
- **Do not sensationalize a disability** by using such language as "afflicted with," "crippled," "suffers from," "confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound" etc.
- **Do not use generic labels for disability groups** such as "the retarded" or "the deaf."
- Do not define individuals by their disability. **Put People First**, not their disability.
- **Emphasize abilities**, not limitations. Show people as active participants in society.
- After the first *People First Language* reference, it's alright to use "disabled person" as a secondary reference.
- Do not use euphemisms to describe a disability.

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People First Language Preferred Expressions:

Say/Write…	Instead of…
Child with a disability	handicapped or disabled
Individual with cerebral palsy	palsied, CP or spastic
Person who has….	Afflicted, suffers from, victim of
Nonverbal (with speech)	mute or dumb
Child(ren) with autism	autistic
Developmental delay	slow or retarded
Emotional disorder/mental illness	crazy or insane
Deaf or has a hearing impairment	deaf and dumb
Communicates with sign language	signer
Uses a wheelchair	confined to a wheelchair
Has a cognitive; with disabilities	retarded
He has epilepsy	epileptic
Adult with Down syndrome	mongoloid, suffers from Down syndrome
Has a learning disability	is learning disabled
Has a physical disability	is physically disabled/crippled
Non-disabled	normal, healthy
Congenital disability	birth defect
Condition	disease (unless it IS)
Seizures	fits
Cleft lip	hare lip
Has mobility impairment	lame or crippled
Paralyzed	invalid or paralytic
Has quadriplegia	quadriplegic
Has paraplegia	paraplegic

Thank you for your time and willingness to hear about creating true inclusion and diversity. We hope that you will help *make a difference for family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers who live with disabilities* by using *People First Language* and encourage others to do the same. Our goal is to change public perception and create more welcoming attitudes through the words we choose. By placing emphasis on the person first, we enhance our communities because everyone knows they count!

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People First Language:

These words and expressions are currently preferred and reflect a positive attitude. Some language is "trendy" and meanings may vary depending on the context. The ideal is to incorporate these words into our language in a way that first and foremost, expresses the dignity of the person.

- **Blind; blindness**
- **Low vision; person with low vision**
- **Vision impaired**
- **Disabled (secondary reference)**
- **Person with cerebral palsy**
- **Person with a disability**
- **Person with developmental disabilities; developmentally disabled**
- **Person with paraplegia**
- **Psychological/emotional disability**
- **Wheelchair-user or uses a wheelchair**

Not all people with disabilities agree on which language or terminology is preferred like any other large, yet identifiable group of people. Individuals will vary as to how they refer to themselves and how they would like you to refer to them.

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