



Idaho Council on  
Developmental Disabilities

802 W Bannock, Suite 308  
Boise, Idaho 83702

Phone: 208-334-2178  
Toll Free: 1-800-544-2433  
Fax: 208-334-3417

Email: [icdd@icdd.state.id.us](mailto:icdd@icdd.state.id.us)

*For me, words  
are a form of  
action capable  
of influencing  
change.*

*~ Ingrid Bengis*

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People  
First  
Language

# People First Language

- Are you myopic or do you wear glasses?
- Are you cancerous or do you have cancer?
- Are you freckled or do you have freckles?
- Are you handicapped/ disabled or do you have a disability?
- People First Language says what a person has, not what a person is.
- People First Language puts the person before the disability.

**People First Language** is terminology used when referring to people with disabilities. It refers to the person first, rather than the disability.

A disability is simply a diagnosis given by a physician. If you were recently diagnosed with pneumonia would it make sense to refer to you as pneumatic? No. Just like it doesn't make sense to call someone who has been diagnosed with autism as "autistic," someone with mental retardation as "retarded," or someone who has epilepsy as "epileptic."

People First Language is about speaking accurately about an individual with a disability. It emphasizes the person's worth and abilities. It is not about being politically correct, it's about effectively communicating on the subject of disability. The term "handicapped" refers to a

person having to beg on the street with "cap in hand." The term "disabled" means "broken down." The use of these terms and others alike are inaccurate, inappropriate, offensive and do not reflect the individuality, equality, or dignity of people with disabilities.

People with disabilities are an integral part of the general public. Be careful not to use terms "we/they" that suggest segregation or group all individuals with disabilities together, for example, "the disabled," "the deaf," or "the blind."

A person's disability should be mentioned only if it is relevant. If it isn't relevant, why mention it? Don't be intimidated by terminology. Remember, people with disabilities are simply people who happen to have disabilities.

## People First Language

## Avoid These Words

☺ Person with a disability or a person who has a disability	☹ Cripple/handicapped/invalid (invalid means "not valid")
☺ Person who has a leaning disability/mental retardation/developmental delay/ADD/cerebral palsy/autism/epilepsy	☹ Slow/retarded/lazy/stupid/underachiever/moron/mongoloid/victim/afflicted/autistic/epileptic
☺ People/individuals without disabilities	☹ Healthy/normal person (this implies that a person with disabilities is not normal)
☺ Person who is deaf/cannot speak/uses a communication device	☹ Deaf mute/deaf & dumb
☺ Person who is blind/has visual impairments	☹ The blind
☺ Person who was born with a disability/congenital disability	☹ Birth defect
☺ Person who uses a wheelchair/crutches (people use a wheelchair for mobility and freedom).	☹ Restricted/confined to a wheelchair/wheelchair bound/cripple
☺ Accessible Parking	☹ Handicapped Parking

The table to the right has examples of positive and negative phrases. Note that positive phrases put the person first.