

# It's Time to Embrace People First Language

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These days, there is a big emphasis on "people-first language." Has political correctness run amok, or should we change the way we talk to better reflect respect for people with disabilities?

The words we use to describe one another can have an enormous impact on the perceptions we and others have, how we treat one

another, mutual expectations, and how welcome we make people feel.

People First language is a respectful way of speech, puts the person before the disability and uses words all people understand. Words are hurtful when used incorrectly. As society's language changes, perceptions and attitudes will change increasing acceptance and respect for people with disabilities. Using People First Language is a huge step in the right direction to stop hurting others.

Historically, people with disabilities have been regarded as individuals to be pitied, feared or ignored, and have been disrespected and devalued members of society. They have been portrayed as helpless victims, heroic individuals overcoming tragedy and "charity cases" who must depend on others for their wellbeing and care and at times, "repulsive" persons.

Much has changed; new laws, disability activism and expanded coverage of disability issues have altered public awareness and knowledge, eliminating the worst stereotypes and misrepresentations. As we well know, old attitudes, experiences and stereotypes die hard.

People with disabilities continue to seek accurate portrayals that present a respectful, positive view of individuals as active participants of society, in regular social, work and home environments.

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Using People First language is a huge step in the right direction to stop hurting others. So what do you call People with disabilities?

Friends, neighbors, coworkers, dad, grandma, Joe's sister, my big brother, our cousin, Mrs. Schneider, George, husband, wife, colleague, employee, boss, reporter, driver, dancer, mechanic, lawyer, judge, student, educator, home owner, renter, man, woman, adult, child, and partner.

Words are powerful and they can build up or break down!! Other civil rights movements generated changes toward more respectful and accurate language and attitudes; the Disability Rights Movement is doing the same, beginning with People First Language. (This is the 4-page version, with examples.)

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People First Language (Spanish) - Thanks to Linda Schumacher, The Institute for Education and Professional Development, for this translation. Click here to read:

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