

# INFO SHEET: RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE

## DISABILITY RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

*Respectful language is language that is inclusive, respectful and promotes the acceptance and valuing of all people. It is language which is free from words, phrases or tones that demean, insult, exclude, stereotype, infantilise or trivialise people.*

*Respectful language is not about impinging on free speech or political correctness; it is about communicating in a way that is accessible and respectful. It is language that values, includes and empowers all people.*

*Language is dynamic and fluid and the meaning and connotations of words can change rapidly. It is important to apply the inclusive language principles outlined in this guideline, rather than learning specific appropriate phrases, as these may change over time.*

### Focus on the person, not the impairment

Referring to people with disability requires knowing the correct terms to use and how to avoid terms that might be inadvertently insulting to the individual, or that might stereotype them to others.

The general principle to apply with regard to improving language inclusivity regarding disability is to focus on the person, not the disability. Hence, phrases such as 'person with disability' or 'musician with vision impairment' are considered more inclusive and sensitive.

However, as with all forms of language inclusiveness, avoid unnecessary or gratuitous reference to the disability at all if it is not pertinent to the discussion.

Don't make out that people with disability are victims or objects of pity

Just because a person experiences disability, it doesn't make them weak, a victim or someone to be pitied.

Examples of language that can imply people should be pitied include: "suffering from...", and "afflicted by/with...". We try to remove the emotion from the language, for example, "Steve experiences depression", or "Nadia has epilepsy".

Conversely, don't use language that implies a person with disability is inspirational simply because they experience disability

People with disability are just living their lives; they are no more super-human than anyone else. Implying that a person with disability is courageous or special just for getting through the day is patronising and offensive, for example 'I just don't know how you do it!'

People are not 'bound' by their wheelchairs

The term wheelchair-bound is one that is commonly used in mainstream media, and it is one that really irritates (and often offends) many people with disability. A person who uses a wheelchair is not bound by the chair; they are enabled and liberated by it. "Confined to a wheelchair" is equally as negative. We say "wheelchair user" or "person who uses a wheelchair", instead.





## Avoid euphemisms and made-up words

“Differently abled”, “people of all abilities”, “disAbility”, “diffAbled”, “special needs”, are all euphemistic and can be considered patronising. While the intention is usually good, these phrases tend to fall into the trap of implying people with disability are special or inspirational, for living with disability.

## Change the focus from disability, to accessibility

Referring to Accessibility rather than Disability makes the focus much more inclusive and incorporates the requirements of a diverse range of people who may have access needs, including older people, parents and carers of young children, and travellers.

For example, car parks, lifts and bathrooms are now appropriately described as accessible, rather than disabled or handicapped.

## Communication tips

When communicating with someone with disability, it is important to remember to treat each person as an individual. Treat people with respect and consideration and in the way that you would want to be treated.

Tips to make everyone feel more comfortable:

- If you are not sure about something, ask the person directly.
- Speak directly to the person with a disability, even if a person without disability is with them.
- Address the person by their name if you know it.
- Offer assistance if it appears necessary, but wait for acceptance and instruction before proceeding.
- Greet the person the same way you would

greet anyone.

- Use a normal tone of voice - do not raise your voice unless asked to. Be polite and patient - do not rush the conversation.
- Don't pretend to understand, let the person know you are having difficulty.
- Be flexible and reword rather than repeat anything that is not understood.
- Only refer to the person's disability if necessary.
- Relax - everyone makes mistakes; apologise if you believe you have embarrassed someone.



## SAY

Person with disability	Victim, disabled person, suffers from, not
Person with cerebral palsy	Afflicted by / with
Person with a vision disability	Afflicted by / with, cannot see
Person with autism	Autistic person
Person with a physical disability	Crippled, crippling, invalid
Person who uses a wheelchair	Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair
Person with a hearing disability / person who	Deaf and dumb, mute
Accessible parking, accessible toilets	Disabled or handicapped toilets / parking
Mental health condition	Mental health problem, mentally ill
Person without disability	Non-disabled, able bodied, normal
Learning disability / difficulty	Retarded, special needs, slow



## AVOID SAYING

## What should I say and avoid saying?

