Sheridan centre for equity and inclusion logo

TALKING TIPS: Person-First Language

Attitudes and language can create barriers. When one aspect of identity is made the focus, sometimes we forget to see a person. This can make people feel invisible, and like they are “other than,” or an outsider.

Here are some alternatives for language used to describe persons with disabilities. Please remember that language is constantly evolving. If you’re unsure, it is best to ask, respectfully.

It is also important to remember that each individual uses language that fits their identity. It is important to reflect the language that individuals use for themselves.

| Instead of … | Try … |
| --- | --- |
| autistic | person with autism, a person with Autism Spectrum Disorder |
| birth defect, congenital defect | person with a disability since birth, person with a congenital deformity disability |
| confined, bound, or restricted by a wheelchair | person who uses a wheelchair |
| crazy, insane, lunatic, psycho, mental | person with a mental illness, person with a mental disorder, person with a mood disorder, person with depression, etc. |
| cripple, crippled, lame, physically challenged, handicapped, the disabled | person with a disability, person with a physical disability, person with a spinal cord injury, person who uses a mobility device |
| deaf, hearing impaired | person who is deaf, person who is hard of hearing, person who is deafened (i.e., became deaf later in life), person with hearing loss |
| deaf and dumb, deaf-mute | person who is deaf |
| epileptic | person who has epilepsy |
| fits, spells, attacks | seizures |
| learning disabled, learning disordered, dyslexic | person with a learning disability, person with a developmental disability |
| normal | person without a disability (e.g., person who is sighted, a hearing person) |
| schizo, schizophrenic, schizoid | person with schizophrenia |
| spastic, spaz | person who has muscle spasms, person with a communication disorder |
| stutterer | person who stutters, person with a communication disorder |

Adapted from Humber College’s “Appropriate Language for Persons with Disabilities,” George Brown College’s “A Way with Words.”

If you would like this information in an accessible format, please contact the Centre for Equity and Inclusion, at the email address or phone extension below.

**CENTRE FOR EQUITY AND INCLUSION**

equity@sheridancollege.ca | ext. 2229