

# The Language of Disability

43 million Americans have disabilities, so it is important that all are described and spoken to **respectfully**. People with disabilities prefer that we focus on their individuality, their strengths and talents, not their disability.

Using respectful language means using “people” or “person” at the start of a phrase. The term “people with disabilities” is preferred.

Tips for speaking to people with disabilities, or about them:

<i>Please do NOT use:</i>	<i>Please use “People First” words:</i>
1. the deaf	1. <u>people</u> who are deaf
2. the vision impaired	2. <u>people</u> with vision impairments
3. the disabled	3. <u>people</u> with disabilities
4. polio victim	4. a <u>person</u> had polio
5. a victim of AIDS	5. a <u>person</u> with AIDS
6. bound/confined to a wheelchair	6. uses a wheelchair
7. homebound employment	7. employed in the home
8. victim	8. <u>person</u> who has or experienced
9. crippled	9. <u>person</u> with a disability
10. invalid	10. <u>person</u> who has a disability caused by

Do not describe or treat people with disabilities as to be pitied, feared, or ignored, or that they are somehow more heroic, courageous, patient, or more “special” than others. Do not use the term “normal” in contrast.

When talking about people with disabilities, always choose words that carry nonjudgmental and accurate descriptions.

A person with a disability is a person like anyone else. If you don't know what to say or do, let the person who has the disability help to put you at ease and set the pace for talking.

**IDEA:** Role-play each of the above in pairs of the DON'T and the DO. Then reverse the roles.

*Adapted from: Center for Disability Information & Referral, Indiana University, Bloomington.*