



Words with Dignity

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Guidance on how to write and speak about
people with disabilities

Choosing Words with Dignity

People with disabilities, like other minority groups, are actively seeking full civil rights. They want to be accepted in their communities as equals.

Your portrayal of individuals with handicapping conditions can greatly affect the public's perception of their worth. What you write and what you say can enhance the dignity of people with disabilities and can promote positive attitudes about their abilities.

Let your descriptive words emphasize the person's worth and abilities, not the disabling condition. Refer to the person first rather than the disability. The phrase "people with disabilities" is preferred, for instance, over "the disabled" which tends to emphasize disability and to create the image of an unusual and homogeneous group.

- person who is blind; person who is visually impaired
- person who is deaf; person who is hearing impaired
- person who has multiple sclerosis
- person affected by cerebral palsy
- person who has muscular dystrophy
- person with mental retardation
- person with epilepsy; person with a seizure disorder
- person who uses a wheelchair
- person without disabilities; non-disabled person
- physically disabled
- unable to speak; non-verbal
- seizure
- successful, productive
- the blind
- suffers a hearing loss
- afflicted by MS
- CP victim
- stricken by MD
- retarded; mentally defective
- epileptic
- confined or restricted to a wheelchair
- normal person (implies person with a disability isn't normal)
- cripple; lame; deformed
- dumb; mute
- fit
- courageous (implies the person is a hero or martyr)
- drain; burden; poor; unfortunate