

Disability Etiquette Guide

*For individual consultation and group presentations on disability etiquette, contact
Disability Services Planning and Development 703-324-5421; TTY 703-449-1186
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Use Person-First Terms

Disability etiquette begins with using terms that communicate respect.

Person-first terms communicate that you recognize a person is more significant than whatever his or her disability may be. For example:

- ❖ Instead of "Sue is a disabled person," say "Sue is a person with a disability."

Why? Sue's personhood is not disabled. She happens to have a disability.

- ❖ Instead of "John is wheelchair-bound," say, "John uses a wheelchair."

Why? The wheelchair does not control John. John controls the wheelchair.

Reference a person's disability only if it is relevant to his situation. Here's how:

Person First Term	Inappropriate Terms
person with a disability	disabled person, cripple, invalid, gimp, lame, handicapped, physically challenged, limited, differently-abled, handi-capable, victim, afflicted with, stricken, suffers from, special, has problems or special needs, limited, physical limitations, deformed, poor, unfortunate
person who is blind or is visually impaired	the blind
person who is deaf or hard of hearing	suffers a hearing loss
person with a disease or condition	victim, stricken by, afflicted by
person with an intellectual disability	retarded, mentally retarded, MR, slow, retardation, brain damaged
person with epilepsy or with seizure disorder	epileptic
person who uses a wheelchair	confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound, confined, or in a wheelchair
person without disabilities	normal person (implies person with a disability isn't normal), non disabled person
person who doesn't use speech to communicate	non-verbal, dumb, mute
person with a physical disability	cripple, deformed, invalid, gimp, lame, handicapped, physically challenged, limited, deformed
person with a mental illness	crazy, insane, mental patient

Remember what is OK for some people may not be OK for others. If you are unsure, please ask the person how she or he describes himself or herself. When in doubt, call the person by his or her name.

Fairfax County is committed to nondiscrimination on the basis of disability in all county programs, services and activities. To request this information in an alternate format, call 703-324-5868. The TTY is 703-449-1186.