

## Introduction

Triangle, Inc.'s Disability Justice Task Force (DJTF) was formed to address injustices and inequalities brought about by ableism. One of the foundational initiatives of the DJTF was to produce a shared language manual to ensure the use of language that is inclusive and promotes dignity.

This guide will serve as a reference point for words and/or phrases regarding disability, accessibility, and human services. It includes preferred and dignifying words to describe people or situations and definitions of common words/phrases.

## Language and Identity

This guide was created by members of the Triangle, Inc Disability Justice Task Force. Language is a living, evolving device of communication, and it is constantly changing. The language in this guide is based on the current understanding of what is appropriate and preferred by the greater Disability community. Different groups within the Disability community may have their preferred language, and each individual person will have the language they are comfortable with and use. Our mission is not to correct the language of a group or individual, but instead to create a guide for a more general audience.

**Please respect the preferred language of the people you work with and encounter daily, only correcting if their language is especially grievous or harmful to others based on race, religion, nationality, disability, sexuality, gender, etc.**

## Person-First Language vs. Identity-First Language

**Person-First Language** puts the person before the disability.

*Examples:*

- *A person with a disability*
- *A person with an intellectual disability*



**Identity-First Language** puts the person's Disability identity first.



*Examples:*

- *A disabled person*
- *An autistic person*

### Which one should I use?

At first, you should use whatever language you feel most comfortable using. Both Person-First and Identity-First Language are acceptable. Once you know how a person self-identifies, you should use the language they use to self-identify.

# Disability Language: Use This, Not That

Topic	Terms to Use 	Terms to NOT Use 	Reason
Disabilities in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disability</li> <li>Disabled</li> <li>Person with a disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special needs</li> <li>Differently abled</li> <li>Handicapped</li> </ul>	The Disability community has stated that the correct terms to use when referring to the community are “disabled” or “disability.” Other terms were created by those without disabilities and perpetuate ableism.
Infantilization of adults with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Treat individuals with disabilities as equals and avoid using condescending language or tones.</li> <li>Use age-appropriate terms, such as “young adults” or “adults.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Calling adults with disabilities “kids” or “children”</li> <li>Using “baby talk”</li> <li>Speaking for a person or not speaking directly to them (such as directing questions to a parent or caregiver, when they are capable of speaking for themselves)</li> </ul>	Treating adults with disabilities as children undermines their autonomy and independence. This can deny them the opportunity to make their own decisions and control their own lives.
Physical disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Physical disability</li> <li>Physically disabled</li> <li>Specific disability (ie. cerebral palsy, spina bifida)</li> <li>Wheelchair user</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wheelchair bound</li> <li>Crippled</li> <li>Handicapped</li> </ul>	Many terms are rooted in an oppressive history. It is important that you are using terms that do not perpetuate negative undertones of disability.
People without disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People without disabilities</li> <li>Nondisabled</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Normal</li> <li>Able-bodied</li> <li>Typical</li> </ul>	These terms can imply that there is only one way to be “normal” or “able-bodied,” and that anyone who deviates from this norm is somehow inferior, and can be hurtful and alienating to people with disabilities.
Intellectual and developmental disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intellectual disability</li> <li>Developmental disability</li> <li>Specific disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mentally challenged</li> <li>Special needs</li> <li>Mentally retarded</li> </ul>	These terms are seen as derogatory and outdated. They are associated with infantilizing people with disabilities.
Slang words that are rooted in ableism	You should replace the words listed with a term that better states what you are trying to say.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crazy</li> <li>Lame</li> <li>Manic</li> </ul>	These words have demoralizing historical associations for people physically disabled, or neurodivergent.
Referring to an individual’s abilities or support needs	Share specific support needs, learning styles, and accommodations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High functioning</li> <li>Low functioning</li> </ul>	These terms are seen as stigmatizing, inaccurate, and subjective. They are not used by the Autistic community.