

Say This, Not That:

Guide to Disability Terminology

Disclaimer & Content Warning: Some of the language and terminology used to describe people with disabilities in the past has changed over time, and it's important for us to understand the origins of culturally-accepted language. However, most language related to disability has been (and continues to be) problematic and harmful. For educational purposes only, some of these outdated and offensive terms are present here in this overview. We offer a content warning because this ableist terminology may be traumatizing or triggering for some people. Lifeworks does not use nor endorse the use of these outdated and offensive terms in any context beyond this educational resource.

Say This Inclusive Language	Not That Outdated Language	Why? Reasoning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-disabled • Does not have a disability • Without a disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able-bodied 	<p>The term, “non-disabled,” is used to describe someone who does not identify as having a disability. For some people, the term, “able-bodied,” implies that all people with disabilities lack “able bodies” or the ability to use their bodies well.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She/he/they has muscular dystrophy. • She/he/they lives with bipolar disorder. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Afflicted with • Suffers from 	<p>“Afflicted with” or “suffers from” assumes that a person with a disability has a reduced quality of life, which is not true. Avoid descriptions that connote pity. Use neutral language when describing a person who has a disability.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with a disability • Disabled person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handicap • Handicapped person 	<p>There is a deep stigma associated with the word “handicap,” as it is defined as “a disadvantage that makes achievement unusually difficult.” Consider that as applied to a person, and what harmful impacts that has to their internalized worth. Note that some individuals prefer person-first language while others may prefer identity-first language.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Functional needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Special needs	<p>The word, “special,” in relationship to those with disabilities is now widely considered offensive because it euphemistically stigmatizes that which is different.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wheelchair-user• Person who uses a wheelchair	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wheelchair-bound• Confined to a wheelchair	<p>A person should not be defined only in relationship to a piece of equipment. Wheelchairs can liberate people by increasing access. Also, people who use wheelchairs are not permanently confined in them, but rather are transferred to sleep, sit in chairs, drive cars, etc.</p>

Source: [National Center on Disability and Journalism](#)

For more inclusion and educational resources, visit: lifeworks.org