

BEING MINDFUL, MATTERS

Pointers when speaking about disability and impairment

The **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** recognises disability as an evolving concept which results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers. It recognizes persons with disabilities as those persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

The **White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** is in agreement: *“There are various definitions of disability. However, all the rights-based definitions share certain common elements even if they emphasise or word them differently. Common elements include: The presence of impairment; Internal and external limitations or barriers which hinder full and equal participation; a focus on the abilities of the person with a disability; loss or lack of access to opportunities due to environmental barriers and/or negative perceptions and attitudes of society.”*

We are in agreement and prefer the use of “person first” language - to respectfully address the individual, emphasizing the person and not the disability.

If you are unsure how to refer to someone, ask the person.



**Respect,
Listen,
Ask.**

SAY • Persons with Disabilities • Disabled people.

WHY?

The disability rights movement of SA accepts the suggested terms and it aligns with international practices.



AVOID

- Physically challenged
- Differently abled

SAY • Person with cerebral palsy.

WHY?

Words like “suffers from” indicate on-going pain and torment, which is not the case for most Persons with Disabilities. “Afflicted with” denotes a disease, which most disabilities are not. “Victim of” implies that a crime is being committed on the person who has a disability.



AVOID

- ... suffers from...
- ... is afflicted with...
- ... is a victim of...

SAY • Uses a wheelchair • Wheelchair user

WHY?

For someone using a wheelchair, wheelchairs are a convenient mode of mobility. When referring to someone as “wheelchair bound” or “confined to a wheelchair”, you disregard that many Persons with Disabilities engage in activities without their wheelchairs, for example, driving, sleeping, and making use of the bathroom. The use of a wheelchair is liberating for those who rely on it for mobility purposes.



AVOID

- Wheelchair bound
- Confined to a wheelchair

SAY • Disability • Disabilities

WHY?

The word “handicap” derives from the phrase “cap in hand”, referring to a beggar, and is inappropriate to use when referring Persons with Disabilities. It is also a golf term.



AVOID

- Handicap
- Cripple/Crippled
- Differently abled
- Physically or mentally challenged

SAY • Persons without disabilities

WHY?

Referring to someone as “normal” or “whole”, implies that Persons with Disabilities are not normal or whole. Who determines what “normal” is?

AVOID

- Normal
- Whole

SAY • Client • Customer

WHY?

The word “patient” refers to someone who is ill. Do not call persons with a disability a “patient” unless they are sick. An “invalid” refers to someone who is helpless which is not true for all Persons with Disabilities.

AVOID

- Patient
- Invalid

SAY • Person with diabetes

WHY?

By legal definition some diseases are considered disabilities. Victimization or defining the person by the disease is inappropriate.

AVOID

- She's a diabetic

These four categories have been accepted by the South African Disability Alliance:

Deaf:

an adjective referring to people who identify themselves as members of a cultural and linguistic minority group and who use South African Sign Language as a primary means of communication. Deaf people see themselves as a cultural and linguistic minority. "Deaf" is the descriptor for a distinct group with its own cultural identity and language; it distinguishes the signed-language using community of people who do not hear (Deaf people) from non-signing people who do not hear (deaf people).

Hard of Hearing:

an adjective referring to a person who is audiotically deaf and who uses a spoken language or South African Sign Language as a means of communication and learning.

deaf (lower case "d"):

refers to persons with total hearing loss not using SASL as a primary medium of communication, who use various means of communication and assistive hearing technologies. These include speech, speech/lip reading, cochlear implants, Bone Anchored Hearing Aid (BAHA) and applicable assistive listening devices etc. or a combination thereof. This group primarily aligns with impairment, disability and the hearing world.

Hearing impaired:

refers to persons with varying degrees of hearing loss not using SASL as a primary medium of communication, who use various means of communication and assistive hearing technologies. These include speech, speech/lip reading, hearing aid systems, cochlear implants, BAHAs and applicable assistive listening devices etc. or a combination thereof. This group primarily aligns with impairment, disability and the hearing world.

Deafblind:

Deafblindness is a combination of hearing and vision loss in any variation of the combination in one human body. This results in difficulty for the person to get information and communication as well as mobility challenges.

SAY • Born without arms • Congenital disability

WHY?

A person may be "born without arms" or "has a congenital disability," but is not defective.



AVOID

- Deformed
- Deformity
- Birth defect

SAY

- Person with Down's Syndrome
- Person with cerebral palsy
- Person with epilepsy
- Person with an intellectual disability
- Person with a psychiatric disability
- Person with cognitive disability
- Person with a learning disability

WHY?

It is disrespectful to define someone by his/her disability. Persons with Disabilities must not be regarded as "damaged goods"

AVOID

- Mongol or mongoloid
- Cerebral palsied or spastic
- Epileptic
- Mentally retarded
- Insane
- Brain damaged
- Slow

SAY

- Person with dwarfism
- Person of short stature
- Little person/ Little people

WHY?

It is derogatory to assume that persons with dwarfism belong to a circus



AVOID

- Short circus person
- Midget
- Dwarf

Brought to you by
the National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities



*Being mindful means paying attention in a particular way;
on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgementally*

- John Kabat-Zinn

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