

Language

Words can influence as well as reflect the way people think about disabled people.

Negative words and stereotypes can be a barrier to understanding the reality of disability. In recent years disabled people have sought to change the way language and words are used to describe them.

Not everyone will agree on every term and language changes over time but there is a consensus on some general guidelines. These are based on national research and consultation with a large number of Disability Organisations.

Some tips on language

- It is more important to be helpful and to ask a disabled person if they need any help, or how you can help them, rather than worrying about using the 'wrong' language.
- Use a normal tone of voice, do not patronise or talk down. Speaking too loudly or too slowly to someone who uses a hearing aid or is lip reading can distort sounds or change lip patterns and make it more difficult for people to understand you.
- If you are having difficulties understanding someone, please say you do not understand and try to rephrase your question in a shorter sentence or ask it in a way that can be answered "yes" or "no" - check you both understand what has been said.
- Many Deaf people whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL) may describe themselves as 'Deaf', with a capital D, to emphasise their deaf identity and to show they are part of a distinct community with its own language and culture, in the same way that people with a particular nationality use a capital letter, for example 'a Welsh person'. People who lose their hearing later in life and do not use BSL may describe themselves as deaf with a lower case d. For this reason many Government publications may use the term 'D/deaf' to show they are addressing both communities.
- It is perfectly acceptable to use everyday language, for example, 'see you later', or 'another pair of hands.'
- Never attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to.
- Address disabled people in the same way as you talk to everyone else.
- Communicate directly to a disabled person, even if they are accompanied by an interpreter or companion. Guidance on working with interpreters' is included in Northumberland County Council's Accessible Information Guidelines available on the NCC website.

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Language guidelines

The following recommendations for terms to use have been taken from advice provided by the Government Office for Disability Issues.

Words and phrases to avoid and ones to use

Avoid	Use
(the) handicapped; the disabled; the housebound; people with disabilities	disabled people or disabled person (these are the terms used in the Equality Act)
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of	has [name of condition or impairment] e.g. has epilepsy or has dyslexia
confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user
mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal	has a learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural)
cripple, invalid	disabled person
spastic	person with cerebral palsy
able-bodied or normal	non-disabled
mental patient, insane, mad	person with a mental health condition
deaf and dumb; deaf mute	deaf person, Deaf (user of British sign language), person with a hearing impairment, D/deaf people
the blind	people with visual impairments; blind people; blind and partially sighted people
An epileptic, diabetics, depressive, etc	people with epilepsy / diabetes / depression or someone who has epilepsy / diabetes / depression
dwarf; midget	someone with restricted growth or short stature
fits, spells, attacks	seizures

For more information on why these terms are used please see link below.

(Source of information: [Government Office for Disability Issues](#))

