

It's the person first-then the disability

You are at a bus station waiting for the bus to come, when another person arrives as well. This person is seated in a wheelchair as shown below. So, what are your first thoughts?

What do you see first?

The wheelchair?

The physical difference?

The person?

If you thought of a person in a wheelchair unable to get on the bus, would you say << there is a handicapped person unable to get on the bus>>?

Or, would you say <<there is a person with a disability who might be handicapped by an inaccessible bus>>?

What is the proper way to speak to / or about someone who has a disability?

Consider how would you introduce someone who doesn't have a disability. You would give the name, where they live, what they are interested in, where they work ecc..Why say it differently for a person with disabilities? Every person is made up of many characteristics and few want to be identified only by their ability to play tennis, for example!

In speaking or writing, remember people with disabilities are like everyone else, except they happen to have a disability. Therefore, here are some few tips for improving our language related to disabilities and handicaps:

1. Speak of the person first, then the disability.
2. Emphasize abilities, not limitations.
3. Do not label people as part of a disability group (e.g. don't say <<the disabled>>, say <<people with disabilities>>.
4. Don't give excessive praise or attention to a person with disability; don't patronize.
5. Choice and independence are important so avoid speaking of someone and let them talk for themselves.
6. A <<disability>> is a functional limitation that interferes with a person's ability to walk, talk, hear, learn ecc. Use the word <<handicap>> to describe a situation or barrier imposed by society, the environment or oneself.



Say	Instead of
Person with disability	Disabled or handicapped person
Person with cerebral palsy	Spastic or palsied
Person with/who has...	Afflicted, suffers from, victim...
Nonverbal	Mute, dumb
Mental illness	Crazy, insane
Deaf or hard of hearing	Deaf and dumb
Person with retardation	Retarded
Person with Down Syndrome	Mongoloid
Non-disabled	Normal, healthy
Seizures	Fits
Has hemiplegia, paraplegia...	Hemiplegic, paraplegic...
Of short stature	Dwarf or midget