

Curriculum Support Faculty - Disability Language Support Sheet

It is very important that we set good, positive examples for all with regard to appropriate language. Here are some examples of negative terminology which we need to avoid because they are likely to cause offence:

Afflicted with – conveys a tragic or negative view about an impairment or health condition

Suffering from – confuses disability with illness and implies that an impairment or health condition is a social burden

Victim of – infers that an impairment or health condition is somehow a tragedy

(all three imply that disabled people are essentially to be pitied)

Cripple or crippled, spastic, handicapped, dumb, mad, subnormal – older terminology is sometimes still used particularly by older people, but it is generally thought to be offensive

Abbreviated words such as **Spas** are sometimes used as a form of verbal abuse

Wheelchair bound – disabled people are not bound to their wheelchairs, they are wheelchair users

Invalid – this term literally means not valid

Able-bodied – the preferred term is 'non-disabled'. 'Able-bodied' suggests that all disabilities are physical and ignores unseen (hidden) disabilities and that disabled people are not able/capable

Find out more about the Social and Medical Models of disability [here](http://www.allfie.org.uk) – from www.allfie.org.uk.

Additionally, below is a table indicating some common language to use instead of language that is now seen to be offensive:

Instead of using...	Preferred language is...
The disabled, handicapped, retarded, spastic, invalid, cripple, suffering from	Disabled. Has an impairment e.g. mobility impairment/hearing impaired, visually impaired
People with a disability/disabilities, person/child/woman/man with a disability/disabilities	Disabled person/people/child/woman/man or person/people/child/woman/man with an impairment
The deaf	Deaf, hearing impaired, hard of hearing people
The blind	Blind, visually impaired, partially sighted people
Mentally handicapped	People with learning difficulties, people with a learning disability, people with learning difficulties
Deaf and dumb	Dual sensory impairment, deafblind
Mental illness/mental health problems	Living with mental health needs or requirements or diagnosis if appropriate but being referred to by name is preferred
Physically handicapped	Physical impairment
Severely disabled, suffers from...	Living with (state medical condition) or has epilepsy, is deaf etc.
Epileptic, dyslexic, schizophrenic	Person with epilepsy, dyslexia or schizophrenia
Mongol	Disabled person, person with Down's syndrome

Instead of using...	Preferred language is...
Carers (only to be used when the individual disabled person cannot make decisions for her/himself)	Family members, relatives and friends (unless registered foster carer, for example)
Carers (meaning paid home carers)	Personal assistants, sighted guide, support worker (as appropriate)
Special needs	Specific needs/requirements individual needs, learning support needs, access requirements
Wheelchair bound For wheelchairs	Wheelchair user For wheelchair users
Disabled toilet	Accessible toilet
Disabled Parking	Blue badge holder Parking for disabled people
Mentally ill	Person with mental health difficulties/issues
Autism Spectrum Disorder, suffering from autism	Autism Spectrum Condition, young person with autism
Helper	Personal assistant, sighted guide, support worker (as appropriate). Use the professional title
Dwarf, midget	Person of restricted growth
Mental handicap	Learning difficulty (not to be confused with mental health difficulty)
Word blind	Person with dyslexia, person with specific learning difficulties
Slow, retarded	Brain injury, cognitive impairment

As with all these phrases and terminology, language can have a significant negative impact, if used incorrectly. If there is any doubt please ask – best to avoid uncertainty by asking a question once than spend time using offensive/incorrect language and terminology.

Developed from <http://www.disabilitysheffield.org.uk/admin/resources/disability-terminology-and-etiquette.pdf>
(Disability Sheffield)

Also refer to the considerable resources available at World of Inclusion - <http://worldofinclusion.com/>