

# Person First Respectful Language



*What do you call a person  
with a disability?*

*A person.*

# What is Person First Respectful Language?

People with disabilities are, first and foremost, people. More than just a fad or political correctness, person first respectful language is a way of emphasizing each person's value, individuality and capabilities. It eliminates stereotypes, negative assumptions and generalizations by focusing on the person rather than the disability.



## *Ways to promote understanding, respect and dignity*

- Emphasize abilities, not limitations. Say, for example, “A man walks with crutches,” not, “He is crippled.”
- Avoid negative words that imply tragedy or evoke pity, such as “afflicted with,” “suffers from,” “victim of,” “prisoner of” and “unfortunate.”
- Tell what a person *has*, not what a person *is*. Instead of “He is learning disabled,” say, “He has a learning disability.”
- Do not refer to a person as “confined to” a wheelchair, or “wheelchair bound.” Wheelchairs are liberating to people with disabilities because wheelchairs provide mobility.
- Do not use the word “special,” such as “special schools” or “special bus.” Too often the word is synonymous with “separate,” implying segregation.
- Avoid euphemisms such as “physically challenged,” “inconvenienced,” “differently abled,” and “handicapable.”
- Never equate the person with the disability. In other words, don’t refer to someone as an epileptic or a quadriplegic. These labels are simply medical diagnoses.

# The Person First Respectful Language Initiative

## *Summary*

In 2011, the 82nd Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1481, adding the Person First Respectful Language Initiative to the Texas Government Code.

The legislature found that language used in reference to people with disabilities shapes and reflects society's attitudes toward people with disabilities. Certain terms are demeaning and create an invisible barrier to inclusion. The intent of the legislation is to establish preferred terms and phrases by requiring the use of language that places the **person before the disability**.

It directs the Texas Legislature, the Texas Legislative Council, the Texas Education Agency and each health and human services agency to avoid using certain terms and phrases, such as “mentally retarded” and to replace those terms with preferred phrases, such as “persons with intellectual disabilities.”

Agencies are to use preferred terms and phrases when proposing, adopting or amending their rules, reference materials, publications and electronic media.

Except when necessary to refer to a term used in state or federal statute or publications used to guide clinical practice, agency staff are to use person first respectful language — as listed in the following table.



## Person first respectful language

## Terms to avoid

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intermediate care facility/facilities for individuals with an intellectual disability or related conditions (ICF/IID, ICFs/IID or ICF/IIDs)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intermediate care facilities for persons with mental retardation (ICFs/MR)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Qualified intellectual disability professional (QIDP)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Qualified mental retardation professional (QMRP)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Qualified developmental disabilities professional (QDDP) – this term and acronym to be used only by state supported living centers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Qualified mental retardation professional (QMRP)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local authority (LA)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental retardation authority (MRA)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intellectual disability (ID)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental retardation (MR)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental retardation/ developmental disabilities (MR/DD)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A person, individual, resident or applicant</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Client, consumer, patient, case</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Person with a physical disability</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disabled, handicapped, crippled</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• People with an intellectual disability</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The mentally retarded; retarded people</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• He has a learning disability</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• He is learning disabled</li></ul>

## Person first respectful language

## Terms to avoid

- A person who has Down syndrome

- He's a Down's kid

- A person who has autism

- An autistic person

- A person who has epilepsy
- He has a seizure disorder

- An epileptic
- A victim of epilepsy

- People with a mental illness

- The mentally ill;  
the emotionally disturbed
- Insane; demented

- A person who has quadriplegia
- People with paraplegia

- A quadriplegic
- The paraplegic

- People who are older

- Old people, old men or women
- Senior citizens
- The elderly

- Accessible buses, bathrooms, etc.
- Reserved parking for people with disabilities

- Handicapped buses, bathrooms, etc.
- Handicapped parking

