

# Using Person First Language for Disabilities is About Dignity

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The words we use about others say a lot about the way we see others. When referring to someone with disabilities, we should use person first language (PFL), or what is also known as politically correct language (PCL).

This should be done to help bring positive attitudes towards people with disabilities. So often someone with disabilities is seen as their disability, rather than as the person who they are.

I met a young woman many years ago who has disabilities. She was very insecure and lacked confidence, mostly because of the way society viewed her and how they spoke of her.

She and I spoke often and I would use PFL when speaking and referring to her, and we spoke about using PFL. Within a short time, she blossomed right before my eyes! It was amazing to see the confidence that built up in her as a result of referring to her with PFL.

Years ago it was often thought that if a person has disabilities, then they couldn't contribute to society. Terminology that was used to refer to them was often degrading. Parents had only one option available to them, and that was to institutionalize their child. These children were shut out from their communities and from the world.

Since around the 1970's, parents have wanted, and have demanded other choices, such as home and community based services for their child with disabilities. More and more states are providing these services. Children and adults with disabilities who receive community home based services are flourishing as a result of it. People with disabilities are graduating from high school and college, living on their own or with supports, going out, getting married, working and doing what most people in society do.

Isolating people, with or without disabilities, and using derogatory language (either intentional or non intentional) does great harm. One only needs to look at violence in our schools to see the impact that degrading remarks towards someone can make.

More information on using PFL can be found at <http://www.disabilityisnatural.com/peoplefirstlanguage.htm>

Below is a partial list of positive phrases that should be used as opposed to negative ones:

One should say: Person with a disability	One should not say: Disabled person; handicapped; not normal
One should say: Child with cerebral palsy	One should not say: Cerebral palsy victim; Cerebral

	palsied child
One should say: Has physical disabilities	One should not say: Lame; crippled; victim
One should say: Non verbal; unable to speak	One should not say: Dumb; mute
One should say: Person using a wheelchair	One should not say: Wheelchair bound
One should say: Child with Autism	One should not say: Autistic child
One should say: Child with learning disabilities	One should not say: Learning disabled child
One should say: Power wheelchair	One should not say: Electric chair
One should say: Person with a seizure disorder	One should not say: Epileptic
One should say: Child with mental retardation; child with mental disabilities; child with cognitive disabilities	One should not say: Retarded; retard; defective
One should say: Person with Down Syndrome	One should not say: Down Syndrome child; Mongoloid

About the author: Karen is a website developer and CEO of [Kalidust® Designs, Inc.](#) located in Opelousas, Louisiana. She specializes in small business website development. She also advocates on behalf of children and adults with disabilities and specializes in websites for disability organizations.

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