

# EXAMPLES OF PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

BY KATHIE SNOW; VISIT [WWW.DISABILITYISNATURAL.COM](http://WWW.DISABILITYISNATURAL.COM) TO SEE THE COMPLETE ARTICLE

Remember: a disability descriptor is simply a medical diagnosis;  
People First Language respectfully puts the person before the disability;  
and a person with a disability is more *like* people without disabilities than different!

## SAY:

People with disabilities.

He has a cognitive disability/diagnosis.

She has autism (or a diagnosis of...).

He has Down syndrome (or a diagnosis of...).

She has a learning disability (diagnosis).

He has a physical disability (diagnosis).

She's of short stature/she's a little person.

He has a mental health condition/diagnosis.

She uses a wheelchair/mobility chair.

He receives special ed services.

She has a developmental delay.

Children without disabilities.

Communicates with her eyes/device/etc.

Customer

Congenital disability

Brain injury

Accessible parking, hotel room, etc.

She needs... or she uses...

## INSTEAD OF:

The handicapped or disabled.

He's mentally retarded.

She's autistic.

He's Down's; a mongoloid.

She's learning disabled.

He's a quadriplegic/is crippled.

She's a dwarf/midget.

He's emotionally disturbed/mentally ill.

She's confined to/is wheelchair bound.

He's in special ed.

She's developmentally delayed.

Normal or healthy kids.

Is non-verbal.

Client, consumer, recipient, etc.

Birth defect

Brain damaged

Handicapped parking, hotel room, etc.

She has problems with...has special needs.

***Keep thinking—there are many other descriptors we need to change!***

Excerpted from Kathie's People First Language article, available at [www.disabilityisnatural.com](http://www.disabilityisnatural.com).

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## Examples of People First Language

<b>Say</b>	<b>Instead of</b>
People with disabilities	the handicapped or disabled
he has a intellectual disability	he's mentally retarded
she has autism	she's autistic
he has Down syndrome	he's Downs
she has a learning disability	she's learning disabled
he has a physical disability	he's a quadriplegic/crippled
she's of short stature	she's a dwarf (or midget)
he has an emotional disability	he's emotionally disturbed
she uses a wheelchair or mobility chair	she's wheelchair bound she's confined to a wheelchair
he receives special education services	he's in special education
Typical kids kids without disabilities	normal or healthy kids
Congenital disability	birth defect
brain injury	brain damaged
Accessible parking	handicapped parking
she needs . . . or she uses . . .	she has a problem with . . .

*The difference between the right word and the almost right word  
is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug. --Mark Twain*

**"Disability is a natural part of the human experience..."**  
U.S. Developmental Disabilities Act & The Bill of Rights Act, 1993

The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names.  
--Old Chinese Proverb

If you have questions about People First Language, you should ask a person with a disability for advice or contact People First of Tennessee at (615) 713-1162.

The Arc Tennessee is a non-profit membership advocacy organization for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Membership is tax-deductible.  
Become a member of The Arc today by visiting [www.thearctn.org](http://www.thearctn.org)



## Working with children diagnosed with autism.

Understand our children look the same as other children.

**Behavior does not equal defiance.**

**Often one-step directives are often needed for compliance.**

**Don't be afraid to teach.**

**Build your relationship. Give it time!**

**Variation in skill or challenge level may be like learning it for the first time.**

*Avoid creating templates.*

**Setting expectations, making plans, making lists.**

Using incentives and rewards.

**Hand-over hand. Watching for prompt dependency.**

*Understand skill building is slower and new skills must be learned & maintained by repetition.*

*Patience, because processing time may be slower.*