

Suggestions for Specific Disability Labels:

Stigma and Deficit Based	Use Instead
Birth Defect, Brain Damaged	Congenital Disability, Brain Injury
Mental Retardation (MR), Retarded	Cognitive Disability
She/He is Autistic	She/He has Autism
She/He is Downs	She/He has Down Syndrome
Lame, Crippled, physically challenged, paralyzed, etc.	She/He has Cerebral Palsy (CP), Spina Bifida (SB), Muscular Dystrophy (MD), Multiple Sclerosis (MS), etc.
Wheelchair—bound, Confined to a wheelchair	She/He uses a mobility chair
Quads, paras	She/He has a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), quadriplegia, paraplegia, etc.
She/He is LD, ADHD, SI, EBD, ODD, etc.	She/He has a learning disability (LD), has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Sensory Integration Disorder (SI), Emotional Behavioral Disorder (EBD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), etc.
Suffers from, is afflicted with, etc.	Has
Special Needs	
Levels of Disability, Mild, Moderate, Severe, etc.	
Normal, Typical, Healthy, Regular	
She/He is (in) special education (ed).	She/He receives special education (ed) services.
Handicapped Parking, Handicapped Ramp, etc.	Accessible Parking, Access Ramp, etc.
Problems	Needs

Exceptions to the Rule:

Always allow individuals to identify themselves as they wish. Some people with sensory disabilities do not use PFL to identify. For example, they might identify like "I'm deaf", or "I'm blind". Others do use PFL and identify like "I have a hearing impairment", or "I have a visual disability".

In terms of the deaf community or the blind community (not everyone claims membership to these intangible communities), many who do claim membership to these communities have chosen not to affiliate themselves with the overall disability community (Snow, 2001). Specifically, deaf people (as they like to be called) believe that being deaf is not a disability; it simply represents a different culture (Deaf culture) which has its own identifiable language (Sign) (Snow, 2001).

Snow, K. (2001). People First Language: New Ways of Thinking and Talking. In K. Snow, *Disability Is Natural* (pp. 233-266). Woodland Park: BraveHeart Press.

Person First Language: A Quick Glance

Person First Language or PFL is a method of language use that identifies people before their impairments. PFL is a language method that emphasizes the importance of empowerment, strengths, and potential. This language method uses words that describe what a person "has" instead of what a person "is" (Snow, 2001). A person is not his/her disability. Disability is one small part of a spectrum of human characteristics. If you describe a person by what he/she is, you are telling the person and the world that is all you think they are.

PFL is not to be confused with Political Correctness or PC. So, what is the difference? PC is a valuable language method when it emphasizes dignity and respect of the person. PC is useful when people who have been disenfranchised by language for many years are able to "right the wrong" inflicted on them by disempowering language use (Snow, 2001). In some points, PC is used to mock the concept of PFL and marginalize the efforts to promote dignity and respect through language methods like PFL. For example, when describing someone who is short as "vertically challenged" or someone who has trouble reading maps as "directionally challenged" (Snow, 2001).

"The first way to devalue someone is through language, by using words or labels to identify a person/group as "less than", as "the others", or "not like us" and so forth. Once a person/group has been identified this way, it makes it easier to justify prejudice and discrimination. Our language shapes our attitudes; our attitudes shape our language; they're intertwined. And our attitudes and language drive our actions." - *DisabilityIsNatural.com*

The Basics of PFL:

Always put the person first, first and foremost we are all individuals. We are all human and deserve the dignity and respect that should come with the human experience. Remove "disabled" or "handicapped" from your language repertoire. People with disabilities are not "broken down", or inoperable. Society uses words associated with having a disability to describe things that are broken, ineffective, or inoperable. A disability simply means having a body part that works differently (Snow, 2001).

The use of euphemisms like "physically (or mentally) challenged" puts the "problem" of the disability in the responsibility of the individual to "fix" (Snow, 2001). As if it was something to be overcome with enough effort instead of an organic difference in functioning.

People born with disabilities have had to fight against labels all their lives. PFL emphasizes the opportunity for individuals to identify themselves first, not how society has deemed them. Adults with developmental disabilities introduced PFL when they demanded to be known as people, not their labels (Snow, 2001). When using PFL, we use words not as definers of human beings, but as descriptions of characteristics (Snow, 2001). For example, a person who has cancer does not say, "I'm cancerous". They say, "I have cancer". A parent does not say "My daughter is freckled", they say "my daughter has freckles". Of course, there are some exceptions to this for an example, some people say "I'm a diabetic," while others say "I have diabetes". Reasoning for this difference is not documented or informed, one could speculate that it is due to the lack of stigma attached to these labels compared to having a disability of some kind (Snow, 2001).

PFL provides a vehicle to improve our language and our attitudes to be free of demeaning, stereotypical views about people who have a disability.