



PUTTING CLIENTS FIRST: A GUIDE TO PERSON FIRST LANGUAGE

The words each of us uses to interact with and describe one another can have a tremendous impact on the perceptions we may develop, how individuals may be treated, and how someone may feel.

A simple choice of words has the ability to ensure an individual is defined by his or her own abilities and not separated by any limitations.

Person First Language strives to ensure that each individual is identified first as a person, with their disability or impairment described as a secondary attribute. It allows secondary attributes to be seen as only a part of an individual, **not what defines he or she**.

In practice always identify the person before the descriptive adjectives and/or conditions:

Avoid → Use Instead

- The schizophrenic → The gentleman with schizophrenia
- The hearing impaired → Individuals with hearing impairments
- Autistic child → A child with autism
- Cleft palate children → Children with cleft palate
- The retarded adult → Individual with an intellectual disability

The term “mentally retarded” is being phased out.

“Intellectual disability” will soon replace the term in the medical community.

The term “handicapped” is purely situational in nature.

An individual may be handicapped in one situation and not another—thus the term should be used on a limited basis and not to generalize an entire group or population.

Want to learn more? Check out the resources below!

