



DISABILITY TERMINOLOGY AND APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

Challenges faced by persons with disabilities

The World Report on Disability published in 2011 summarized some of the main challenges facing persons with disabilities as follows:

- **Costs:** Persons with disabilities may have extra costs resulting from their disability – studies found that persons with disabilities spend 15% of total household expenditure on out-of-pocket health care costs compared to 11% for non-disabled people.
- **Poverty:** Households with a member with a disability are more likely to experience material hardship – including food insecurity, income poverty, poor housing, lack of access to safe water and sanitation, lack of access to affordable credit, and inadequate access to health care. Conversely, lack of access to basic services (poverty) contributes to the onset of disability (creating a vicious cycle of poverty and disability).
- **Lower participation in education:** Children with disabilities are less likely to attend school as well as more likely to drop out of school, which in turns decreases their chances of developing skills for future employment opportunities. This pattern of non-attendance is more pronounced in poorer countries and also among women and girls with disabilities.
- **Higher rates of unemployment:** Persons with disabilities, particularly women with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed and earn less even when they are employed. A study of 51 countries highlighted employment rates of 52.8% for men with disabilities and 19.6% for women with disabilities, compared to 64.9% for non-disabled men, and 29.9% for non-disabled women.
- **Isolation:** Persons with disabilities face inaccessible infrastructure in buildings and roads, provision of transport, and communication and information systems. This results in persons with disabilities being isolated and having less education, employment and social opportunities. Inaccessible infrastructure limits the extent to which persons with mobility challenges can participate with others, hence the feeling of isolation. Isolation may also be a result of social exclusion due to negative attitudes, low expectations placed on persons with disabilities' ability to contribute meaningfully and discriminatory practices.

Disability terminology and appropriate language

The use of language and words describing people with disabilities has changed over time, and it is important to be aware of the meaning behind the words we use when talking to, referring to, or working with persons with disabilities. Disrespectful language can make people feel excluded and can be a barrier to full participation - hence the need to use language that empowers.

Respectful words to describe persons with disabilities

Here are some ways that people with disabilities are described. This list includes “out-dated language” – terms and phrases that should not be used. This list also includes respectful words that should be used to describe different disabilities.

Disability	Outdated language	Respectful language
Blind or Visual Impairment	Dumb, Invalid	Blind/, Person who is blind/with a visual impairment
Deaf or Hearing Impairment	Invalid, Deaf-and-Dumb, Deaf-Mute	Deaf or Hard-of-hearing, Person who is deaf or hard of hearing
Speech/Communication Disability	Dumb, “One who talks bad”	Person with a speech / communication disability
Learning Disability	Retarded, Slow, Brain- Damaged, “Special ed”	Learning disability, Cognitive disability, Person with a learning or cognitive disability
Mental Health Issue / Psychosocial disability	Hyper-sensitive, Psycho, Crazy, Insane, Wacko, Nuts	Person with a psychiatric disability, Person with a mental health issue
Mobility/Physical Disability	Handicapped, Physically Challenged, “Special,” Deformed, Cripple, Gimp, Spastic, Spaz, Wheelchair- bound, Lame	Wheelchair user, Person with a mobility or physical disability
Albinism	Albino	Person with albinism
Emotional Disability	Emotionally disturbed	Emotionally disabled, Person with an emotional disability
Cognitive Disability	Retard, Mentally retarded, “Special ed”	Cognitively/Developmentally disabled, Person with a cognitive/developmental disability
Short Stature, Little Person	Dwarf, Midget	Someone of short stature
Health Conditions	Victim, Someone “stricken with” a disability (i.e. “someone stricken with cancer” or “an AIDS victim”)	Survivor, Someone “living with” a specific disability (i.e. “someone living with cancer or AIDS”)

Appropriate disability etiquette

It is important to know how to communicate, interact and socialize with persons with types of disabilities. The table below shows some of the disability etiquette to know and use.

Disability	DO	DON'T
Visual Impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify yourself <i>and</i> others around you and describe the place and what is going on • Be specific in giving direction by verbally indicating either left or right • Tell the person if you are moving or leaving their space • Walking with them offer them your arm for guidance • Use the person's name often • In meetings have materials in braille. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Say "turn this way or that way" • Leave the person alone without giving direction • Do not ignore a person with visual impairment by speaking directly to their assistant.
Hearing Impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak normally and maintain eye contact • Find out how the persons prefer to communicate • Learn sign language • Always arrange for a sign language interpreter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shout or exaggerate • Speak to the interpreter but to the person with hearing impairment • Cover your mouth or eat while talking.
Physical Impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move at their speed • Remove obstacles from the environment • Always ask before assisting a person with movement difficulties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk ahead • Lean on or move their wheelchair without permission • Use the phrases "suffers from" or "living with".
Learning Disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak clearly and use simple and short words • Use real-life examples in your description • Use more simple questions with clear options and give the person time to think. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rush into repeating yourself • Use abbreviations and jargon.

Actions to take to help change attitudes towards persons with disabilities	
<i>National/ Regional</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Develop policies and laws which promote the full inclusion of persons with disabilities.</i> • <i>Ensure enforcement of laws which protect the rights of persons with disabilities to facilitate their greater inclusion and visibility.</i> • <i>Use and promote appropriate terminology when referring to or addressing persons with disabilities.</i> • <i>Plan and run disability awareness and inclusion training for staff from public and private sectors.</i> • <i>Promote positive images and case studies of persons with disabilities</i> • <i>Avoid using negative images of persons with disabilities in materials such as depicting them as weak or pitiful.</i> • <i>Recruit persons with disabilities in all sectors.</i> • <i>Promote the appointment of persons with disabilities to decision making roles.</i> • <i>Promote and support the full integration of persons with disabilities in all sectors.</i>
<i>District</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Recruit persons with disabilities in all sectors, including district committees and other decision-making bodies.</i> • <i>Advocate for policies, and bye laws which promote the full inclusion of persons with disabilities.</i> • <i>Lobby for enforcement of laws which protect the rights of persons with disabilities to facilitate their greater inclusion and visibility.</i> • <i>Promote and support the full integration of persons with disabilities in all sectors.</i> • <i>Use and promote appropriate terminology when referring to or addressing persons with disabilities.</i> • <i>Plan and run disability awareness and inclusion training.</i> • <i>Promote positive images and stories of persons with disabilities.</i> • <i>Mainstream disability issues in district development plans.</i>
<i>Community</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Give people with disabilities equal opportunities in all programmes.</i> • <i>Empower persons with disabilities to be role models and present positive images of disability to educate and raise awareness of their challenges and capabilities.</i> • <i>Identify persons with disabilities in the community and promote their inclusion in all aspects of community life.</i> • <i>Use and promote appropriate terminology when referring to or addressing persons with disabilities.</i> • <i>Identify and remove the barriers that prevent persons with disabilities visibility and inclusion in community life.</i> • <i>Promote positive images and stories of persons with disabilities.</i> • <i>Recruit persons with disabilities to village and community committees and other decision-making bodies.</i>