



Understanding People First Language

It's all about respect.

People first language emphasizes the person first. A disability is just one part of who they are.

Always use respectful language. When speaking about people Mosaic serves, use the term intellectual disabilities. Do not use mental retardation or retarded.

Do not use labels or generalization such as “the deaf” or “the disabled.” Instead say “people who are deaf” or “people with disabilities.”

An intellectual disability is not a disease. Do not talk about “symptoms,” “patients,” or “treatment,” unless the person you are describing has an illness as well as a disability.

Focus on a person’s abilities, rather than their disabilities. For example, Jane is not “crippled” or “confined to a wheelchair,” but rather, “Jane cannot walk” or “Jane uses a wheelchair.”

Recognize people with intellectual disabilities at their appropriate age level. A woman in her 30s should not be referred to as “girl” or “kid” but rather as “woman.”

Avoid sensationalist words, such as “brave,” “inspirational,” or “tragic.” These words are stereotypical and some people with disabilities find them insulting.

Always refer to people who do not have disabilities as “without disabilities” rather than “normal.”