



Inclusive and Disability Friendly Language



Inclusive and disability-friendly language is an essential aspect of fostering equality, respect, and accessibility for our students with special educational needs (SEN) / disabilities.

Apart from promoting sensitivity and awareness, language shapes our perceptions of people which is important in avoiding stereotypes or social stigma. Beyond terminology, this brief aims to solidify understanding and foster the foundation of respect for individual differences and to accept disability as part of human diversity.

Key principles and guidelines for using inclusive and disability-friendly language include:

1. **Person-First Language:** Place the person before the disability when referring to individuals with disabilities. For example, "a person with a disability" instead of "a disabled person." This is compared to identity-first language which refers to the disability as an identifier like "autistic or dyslexic person." *See point 2.
2. **Respect Individual Preferences:** Some individuals may have preference for specific terminology or identity-first language. Respect their choices and use the language they prefer. When unclear, use neutral or person-first language (e.g. person with dyslexia)
3. **Avoid Offensive Terms:** Eliminate derogatory and offensive terms (e.g. retard, dumb, spastic) when discussing disabilities.
4. **Avoid Negative Phrases:** Refrain from using phrases that portray disabilities as limitations or diseases, such as "suffers from" or "victim of". These words perpetuate stereotypes. Instead, use neutral language. E.g. wheelchair user.
5. **Avoid stereotypes or labels like "high functioning".**
 - a. Be specific about the person's abilities, skills, and achievements. Avoid sensationalising persons as "inspiring" or patronising them as "overcomers of their disabilities". Disability and individual differences are part of human diversity' and persons with disabilities are similarly expected to have productive and fulfilling lives.
 - b. "High/low functioning" label can stem from an attitude of ableism, a discrimination of people who are less able. Hence the term high/low functioning categorises people based on ability instead of appreciating people for who they are and their individual characteristics.
6. **Using intentional language in our informal speech.** We might have said this as a joke, "Are you dyslexic or what?" Or "I must be autistic." However words matter and habits shape us. Avoid using disability-related terms as a joke, criticism or insult.

Thank you for choosing to use inclusive and disability-friendly language! Our daily intentionality and commitment are vital and powerful steps towards creating an inclusive, respectful, and accessible school for our students with SEN/ disabilities. Refer to the "cheat sheet" on appropriate terminology.

Inappropriate terminology	Appropriate terminology
Disabled person, abnormal, disabled community, differently abled	Person with disability, disability community
SEN students	Students with SEN
Visually impaired	Person who is blind or with low vision
<i>Victim</i> of cerebral palsy, spastic	Person with cerebral palsy
Dumb, mute	Person who cannot speak, has difficulty speaking
Hearing impaired	d/Deaf person Person who is hard of hearing (Capital D for Deaf refers to people who identify as culturally deaf or closely associated with the Deaf community.)
Normal person/student	People without disabilities, able-bodied, sighted person, typical person/student
Retard, mental retardation, a Down's person, mongoloid	Person with a developmental disability, person with intellectual disability /with Down syndrome
Crippled, lame, deformed, <i>suffers</i> from polio	Person with physical impairment/disability, person with polio person who uses a cane, uses leg braces
<i>Confined or restricted</i> to wheelchair, wheelchair bound	Wheelchair user, person who uses a wheelchair
Dwarf, midget	Person with short stature
Slow learners/students	Low progress students
*Autistic person/student *Language evolves over time and terminology may change due to rise in disability pride. Certain segments of the disability community have vocalised preference for identity-first language, i.e. saying "I'm autistic" rather than "I'm a person with autism".	Person or student with autism

