

# People First Language – Being Respectful

New Mexico

## What is People First Language?

People First Language or Person First Language recognizes the person first, and not the disability.

Disability is a natural part of the human experience and people with disabilities make up our nation's largest minority group. Though disabilities can be defined, having a disability does not define the person.

## Using respectful language

When referring to individuals with disabilities, consider the words used. Focus on the person, and who they are, and not on their medical diagnosis. One way to do this is by putting the person's name first. If someone had cancer, it would not be respectful to refer to them as "cancerous." If someone named Bob has autism, it is respectful to refer to him as Bob, who has autism, as opposed to saying that Bob is autistic. Stating the person's disability or diagnosis may not even be relevant or necessary.

Using People First Language is about respectful language. It is important to recognize that People First Language tells us what conditions people have, not what they are. The Person-First perspective helps to reduce stigma, stereotyping, and prejudice towards people with disabilities. If disrespectful language is unknowingly used, a sincere apology can help.

Read more about People First Language by visiting the websites and video links provided on the right side of the page.

## Applying respectful language in everyday life

Engage in conversations with and about persons with disabilities in the same manner as with anyone else. Using respectful language is a way of showing respect for the individual.

There are words that one should never use, as they have come to be derogatory over time. One example is the use the word *retarded* or the "R-word." Rosa's Law was enacted to eliminate the use of this word as it is considered to be outdated and offensive.

## Remember:

Always emphasize abilities and never limitations. Below are a few examples of appropriate use of People First Language, followed with language to avoid.

### Do say:

- They have a disability
- They use or drives a wheelchair
- They have an intellectual disability
- They have autism
- They need behavioral supports
- They are a Brain Injury Survivor
- How should I describe your disability?
- They have Down syndrome
- Accessible parking, hotel room, etc.

### Don't say:

- Handicapped, disabled
- They are wheelchair bound
- They are mentally retarded
- They are autistic
- They have behavior problems
- They have a traumatic brain injury
- What happened to you?
- They are a Downs person
- Handicapped parking, hotel room, etc.



To learn more about respectful language visit:

[cerebralpalsy.org/information/disability/people-first-language](http://cerebralpalsy.org/information/disability/people-first-language)

Your Words, Our Image

[www.rtcil.org/guidelines](http://www.rtcil.org/guidelines)

A word about the R-Word:

[cerebralpalsy.org/information/abuse/r-word](http://cerebralpalsy.org/information/abuse/r-word)

People First Language video:

[youtube.com/watch?v=pbYIhUK9BPY](https://youtube.com/watch?v=pbYIhUK9BPY)

## Questions?

Call the CDD Information Network

**1-800-552-8195**

or visit our website at [www.cdd.unm.edu/infonet](http://www.cdd.unm.edu/infonet)

Informational Tip Sheets:

[www.cdd.unm.edu/infonet/tip-sheets.html](http://www.cdd.unm.edu/infonet/tip-sheets.html)