

Speaking with Awareness: "People-First" Language

OUR VISION:



Language shapes the way those around us speak and act toward one another and conveys the respect we have for others. The use of appropriate language about people with disabilities can be an important tool in building a community that accepts all people.

Appropriate language is both sensitive and accurate. Arts4All Florida promotes the use of "people-first" language — language that puts the focus on the individual, rather than on a disability. "People-first" language helps us remember that people are unique individuals and that their abilities or disabilities are only part of who they are.

Arts4All Florida offers trainings targeted to individuals who work directly with children and adults with disabilities. The goal of each training is to learn successful strategies so that all participants, including those with disabilities, experience success in and through the arts.

We endeavor to create a world in which the arts are universally accessible.

For over 35 years, Arts4All Florida has provided programs that make it possible for people with disabilities to contribute to the social, cultural, and economic life of Florida.

Our programs have demonstrated long-term success in increasing artistic skills, fostering creativity, promoting social skills, creating self-confidence, teaching marketable skills, and providing new ways of communication for people with disabilities.

For more information or alternative formats, contact:
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A Guide to Using People First Language



Please consider the following when writing or speaking about people with disabilities:

Affirmative Phrase

Negative Phrase

- Do not focus on the disability unless it is crucial to a story. Avoid tear-jerking human interest stories.
- Do not portray successful people with disabilities as superhuman or heroes.
- Do not sensationalize a disability by saying afflicted with, crippled with, suffers from, victim of, and so on.
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations. Do not use emotional descriptors such as unfortunate, pitiful and so forth.
- Do not use condescending euphemisms. They reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be dealt with up front.
- Show people with disabilities as active participants of society. Portraying individuals with disabilities interacting with those without disabilities helps break down barriers and open lines of communication.

Person with a disability	The handicapped or disabled
He has a cognitive disability.	He's mentally retarded.
She is on the autism spectrum.	She's autistic.
Person with mental illness.	Crazy, psycho, lunatic
She has a learning disability.	She's learning disabled, slow
He has a physical disability.	He's a quadriplegic / crippled.
She's short of stature.	She's a dwarf or midget.
He has an emotional disability.	He's emotionally disturbed.
She uses a wheelchair or mobility chair.	She's wheelchair bound. She's confined to a wheelchair.
He receives special education services.	He's in special ed.
Typical kids	Kids without disabilities, Normal or healthy kids
Congenital disability	Birth defect
Brain injury	Brain damaged
Accessible parking	Handicapped parking
She needs or she uses	She has a problem with