



National Council for Persons with Physical Disabilities in South Africa

Physical address 4 Lancaster Road, Westdene, 2092

Postal address : PO Box 426, MELVILLE, 2109

Telephone : (011) 7268040

Facsimile : (011) 7265705

E-mail : nationaloffice@ncppdsa.org.za

Website : www.ncppdsa.org.za

POLITICALLY CORRECT TERMINOLOGY IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR

USE	AVOID	REASON
Persons with disabilities Disabled people	Physically challenged Differently abled	The disability rights movement of South Africa only accepts suggested terms / it is also in line with international practices
Johnny is a child with cerebral palsy	Johnny suffers from cerebral palsy Johnny is afflicted with cerebral palsy Johnny is a victim of cerebral palsy	All 3 cast disabilities are negative. "Suffers from" indicates ongoing pain and torment, which is not the case for most persons with disabilities. "Afflicted with" denotes a disease, which most disabilities are not. "Victim of" implies that a crime is being committed on the person who has a disability.
'uses a wheelchair'	'wheelchair bound' or 'confined to a wheelchair'	Persons see their wheelchairs as a convenient mode of transportation, not prisons, and the "bound/confined" phrase belies the fact that many persons with motor disabilities engage in activities without their wheelchairs, including driving and sleeping. (The use of a wheelchair is liberating).
'disability'	'handicap' 'cripple(d)' Differently abled 'physically / mentally challenged (who isn't?)'	The word "handicap" derives from the phrase "cap in hand", referring to a beggar, and is despised by most people with disabilities.
'able-bodied' 'persons without disabilities'	'normal' 'whole'	These term implies that people with disabilities are not normal.
'client' 'customer'	'patient'	Do not call persons with a disability a "patient" unless they are sick.
'person living with AIDS' Person with diabetes	'AIDS victim' 'she's a diabetic'	Some diseases by legal definition are considered disabilities. Victimization imagery or defining the person by the disease is inappropriate.
Deaf	'Deaf-mute' 'Deaf and dumb'	Persons who consider themselves as part of Deaf culture refer to themselves as "Deaf" with a capital "D". Because their culture derives from their language, they may be identified in the same way as other cultural groups, for example "Shangaan".
'born without arms' 'congenital disability'	'deformed' 'deformity' 'birth defect'	A person may be "born without arms" or "has a congenital disability," but is probably not defective.
'person with Down's Syndrome' 'person with cerebral palsy' 'person with epilepsy'	'Mongol' 'Mongoloid' 'cerebral palsied' 'spastic' 'epileptic'	These terms define the person by their condition, and should be avoided at all costs. Hint : Always refer to the person first, and then the disability
"person with an intellectual disability", or "person with a psychiatric disability"	'mentally retarded' 'insane' 'brain damaged'	Persons with disabilities are not retarded or mad and must not be regarded as damaged goods.
Hearing	Loss / deafened hard of hearing	People who lost their hearing after the acquisition of a spoken language.