

People First Language

Always use positive, *people first* language that empowers rather than marginalizes people with disabilities. Here are some examples of offensive language and language that should be used:

| Offensive | Preferred |
|--|---|
| AIDS victim | Person with AIDS |
| birth defect | Person who is disabled since birth, born with a congenital disability |
| cerebral palsied | Person who has cerebral palsy |
| cripple | Person who needs mobility assistance |
| deaf and dumb, deaf mute | Person who is deaf and does not speak |
| deformed | Person who has a physical disability |
| emotionally disturbed | Person with an emotional disability |
| handicapped | Person with a disability |
| hunchbacked | Person with a spinal curvature |
| insane, deranged, deviant | Person with a mental illness |
| midget, dwarf | Person who is small in stature |
| Mongoloid | Person who has Down Syndrome |
| Normal | Non-disabled, able-bodied |
| Retarded | Person with an intellectual disability |
| Wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair | Person who uses a wheelchair |

To learn about DRS' programs and services online:
drs.illinois.gov/success

For more information:

Call or visit your Illinois Department of Human Services' Family Community Resource Center (FCRC).

If you have questions about any Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) program, call or visit your FCRC. We will answer your questions. If you do not know where your FCRC is or if you are unable to go there, you may call the automated helpline 24 hours a day at:

1-800-843-6154

1-866-264-2149 (TTY)

1-217-717-9112 (VP)

You may speak to a representative between:
8:00 a.m. - 5:30 p.m.
Monday - Friday (except state holidays)

For answers to your questions, you may also write:

Illinois Department of Human Services
 Office of Customer Support
 100 South Grand Avenue East
 Springfield, Illinois 62762

Visit our website at:
www.dhs.state.il.us



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State of Illinois
 Department of Human Services

People First

A Guide to Interacting with People with Disabilities



Focus on People First

As the lead state agency serving people with disabilities, the Illinois Department of Human Services', Division of Rehabilitation Services (IDHS/DRS) is dedicated to empowering people with disabilities in becoming full participants in our society.

We can all make this goal a reality by using language that reflects our respect for people with disabilities. While the language you use is important, it is equally important that you demonstrate your respect for people with disabilities through your behavior.

The most important thing to remember when you interact with people with disabilities is that they are people.

Their disability is just one of the many characteristics they have. People with disabilities have the same needs we all do: first and foremost among them is to be treated with dignity and respect.

When you interact with people with disabilities, focus on their abilities, not their disabilities. People with disabilities are unique individuals who have a wealth of knowledge, skills, talents, interests, and experiences that add tremendous diversity, resourcefulness, and creative energy to our society.



Remember, people with disabilities may do things in different ways than people without them however, they can achieve the same outcomes.

General Etiquette Tips

Practice the Golden Rule. Treat everyone as you would like to be treated. Think of the person first, not their disability. Don't shy away from people with disabilities – relax and be yourself!

Always Ask Before Giving Assistance.

Just because a person has a disability, doesn't mean they need or want your assistance. Never help someone without first asking them. One woman recalls: "When I walked on crutches, I was once knocked down by two little old ladies who were going to 'help' me walk on an icy sidewalk. Without asking, they came up, grabbed me, threw me off balance, and down I went!"



Think Before You Speak. Avoid using labels when you speak – they are offensive to everyone, including people with disabilities. Always use ***people first*** language when writing about or speaking to people with disabilities. Examples of ***people first*** language are included in this brochure.

Avoid showing pity or being patronizing. People with disabilities aren't victims. As a person in a wheelchair said, "I am not a wheelchair victim. Wheelchair victims are the people I run into with my footrest at the supermarket."

When you talk to a person with a disability, don't use pet names, such as "honey". It is also very disrespectful to pat people with disabilities on the head or talk down to them as though they were children.

Interacting with People with Disabilities

When you interact with people with disabilities, talk directly to them, not to their companions, aides, or interpreters.

Here are some ways to interact with people with specific types of disabilities:

When you interact with someone who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing,

remember that some individuals may be able to hear, some may be able to lip read, while others prefer to use sign language or assistive technology. Ask them how they prefer to communicate.



When you interact with someone who is blind or visually impaired, always introduce yourself and let them know when you are leaving. You may offer your arm or elbow as a guide if they request assistance but never push, pull or grab the individual. Don't pet or distract a guide dog. The dog is responsible for its owner's safety and is always working – it is not a pet!!

When you interact with someone who uses a wheelchair, do not push, lean on, or hold the person's wheelchair. Try to put yourself at eye level when talking with someone in a wheelchair for an extended period of time.

When you interact with someone with a cognitive disability, speak to the person in clear, simple sentences. Be patient with them and give them time to communicate with you.

When you interact with someone with a speech impairment, allow them as much time as they need to communicate. Be respectful and avoid trying to finish their sentences.