

# WORDS OF POWER AND RESPECT

When talking or writing about a person with a disability, emphasize the person first. Using the person's disability is not the only way to describe the person. For example, "the girl using a wheelchair" may also be "the girl with short red hair." The words below are suggestions for how to use words of power and respect. Each person with a disability may have different words they prefer to use about their disability or the adaptive equipment they use. If you are not sure how to talk about a person's disability, ask the person!

**AVOID:** These words may have negative meanings.

- handicapped / handicap
- cripple / crippled by
- victim of . . .
- birth defect, or defective
- stricken with, or suffering from
- invalid
- condition
- afflicted / afflicted by
- deformed / deformed by
- incapacitated, vegetable, lame
- special
- deaf and dumb, or mute
- patient (only accurate if a disabled or non-disabled person is actually in a hospital or other medical setting)
- confined to a wheelchair
- wheelchair bound, bed bound, or home bound
- the wheelchair (meaning the person using one)
- normal, able-bodied, or typical / average

**USE:** These words are more respectful.

- disabled / disability
- a person who has \_\_\_\_\_ (epilepsy, dyslexia, diabetes, etc.)
- a person born with \_\_\_\_\_ (cerebral palsy, cleft palate, etc.)
- a \_\_\_\_\_ survivor (burn, cancer, stroke, etc.)
- a person with \_\_\_\_\_ (a visual impairment, a developmental disability, a mobility impairment, a psychiatric or mental health disability, learning disabilities, , etc.)
- a person who is \_\_\_\_\_ (Deaf or hard of hearing)
- a person using braces, crutches, a cane, a wheelchair, etc.
- a person without disabilities, or a non-disabled person
- a person who is unable to speak, or non-verbal