

**Support Material  
for clergy, religious and parish staff  
Brochure 1 of 3.**

# WORDS ARE POWERFUL



**Office of Disability and Deaf  
Catholic Charities  
429 East Grandview Blvd.  
Erie, PA 16504  
(814) 824-1257  
ddministry@erieRCD.org  
www.erieRCD.org/Charities/  
Disabilities.html**

**PEOPLE WITH HEALTH CONDITIONS/ EPILEPSY/ CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY AND RESPIRATORY DISABILITIES**

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Outdated Terms</b>	<b>Preferred Terms</b>
Health Conditions	Victim, someone “stricken with an illness or a disability	Survivor, someone living with ... (specific illness)

**People with Epilepsy**

- Most seizure disorders are controlled with medications and most have infrequent seizures while on medication.
  - If a person is having a grand mal seizure, which causes a loss of consciousness and violent muscle contractions, you should take the following steps;
    - ◆ Ease the person to the floor.
    - ◆ Turn the person gently onto one side.
    - ◆ Clear the area around the person of anything hard or sharp.
    - ◆ Put something soft and flat, like a folded jacket, under his or her head.
    - ◆ Remove eyeglasses
- People with Chemical Sensitivity and Respiratory disabilities**
- People with multiple chemical sensitivity and respiratory disabilities such as asthma or emphysema react to toxins in the air.

**PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL/ DEVELOPMENTAL/COGNITIVE DISABILITIES**

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Outdated Terms</b>	<b>Preferred Terms</b>
Intellectual /Cognitive Disability	Retarded, Mentally Retarded, Special Ed, mongoloid	Person with intellectual disability Person with developmental disability

- Intellectual disability is a significant impairment in intellectual ability accompanied by deficits in skills necessary for independent daily living,
- Give them a little extra time to process information.
- When a person with intellectual disability is accompanied by another person, speak directly to the person with the disability and allow the person to speak for him/herself.

**PEOPLE ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM**

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Outdated Terms</b>	<b>Preferred Terms</b>
Autism	Autism Spectrum Disorder High Function Autism Using first person language	Autistic person, On the spectrum, Neurodivergent

- Autism cannot be seen.
- Ask questions about comfort zones and anxiety provoking situations; they will let you know what works best for them.
- Be patient, people on the spectrum process information differently.
- Carefully consider communication needs and socially acceptable behaviors.

**PEOPLE WITH MENTAL (PSYCHIATRIC) DISABILITIES**

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Outdated Terms</b>	<b>Preferred Terms</b>
Mental Health Disability	Crazy, Insane, Nuts, Psycho, Manic, Bi-polar personality	Person with a psychiatric disability, Person with a mental health disability

- The terms mental illness, psychiatric disability and mental health disabilities are essentially interchangeable.
- Mental illnesses are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking and/or behavior.
- Mental Health is a continuum and people may fall anywhere on the scale.

## General Guidelines when talking to and about persons with disabilities

Words are powerful. The words and actions you use when ministering to persons with disabilities and their family matter.

This guide is a tool to help you make your circle big enough for everyone to be included in your parish. Since communication is the key to establishing relationships these are suggestions for preferred language when referring to persons with disabilities and his/her specific disability. There are also thoughts and suggestions of actions that may help to build kinship.

In general, there are 3 golden rules:

**Rule 1:** Always use “person first” language when you are describing a person with a disability, words that emphasize the person-hood, wholeness and abilities of the person. For example; She is a girl with a disability, not the disabled girl. He is a man who is blind, not a blind man.

**Rule 2:** Talk directly to the person and allow the person to speak for him/herself.

**Rule 3:** When in doubt, ASK.

### PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL/MOBILITY DISABILITIES

Disability	Outdated Terms	Preferred Terms
Mobility/ Physical Disability	Handicapped, Physically Challenged, Special needs, Cripple, Gimp, Wheelchair bound, lame	Physically disabled, person with a physical disability

- People who use an apparatus such as a wheelchair, walker or cane consider these items as extensions of their bodies.
- Use wording that emphasizes the ability and not the limitation.
- Portray the person as he/she is in real life.
- Ask a person with a disability if he/she would like assistance. Your help may not be needed, it is all right to offer help.
- Position yourself on his/her eye level

### PEOPLE WITH HEARING DISABILITIES

Disability	Outdated Terms	Preferred Terms
Deaf / Hard of hearing	Invalid, Deaf & Dumb, Deaf-mute	Deaf or hard of hearing Person who is deaf Person who is hard of hearing

- Hearing disability, hard of hearing and deaf mean different things. A hearing disability is the term for all hearing loss. Hard of hearing refers to an individual who has a mild-to-moderate hearing loss. Deaf refers to hearing loss so severe there is little to no hearing.
- The deaf community is an exception to the first-person language rule.
- When an interpreter is part of the conversation, address your comments, questions and concerns directly to the person to whom you are talking.
- Ask the person how they prefer to communicate.

### PEOPLE WITH VISION DISABILITIES

Disability	Outdated Terms	Preferred Terms
Blind/ Visual Impairment	Dumb, Invalid	Blind, Visually Impaired, Person with low vision. Person who is blind

- Blindness is the term that is given to a range of diminished visual perception. Legally a person whose vision when corrected is no better than 20/20 is blind. Most people who qualify as being blind have some level of visual input.
- Introduce or identify yourself by name, also identify and/or introduce other people that may be with you, or part of a group. When leaving the group let them know that you are going.
- Look at your environment; minimize obstacles or plan for ways in which a person with a vision disability can navigate.

### PEOPLE WITH COMMUNICATION DISABILITIES

Disability	Outdated Terms	Preferred Terms
Speech/ Communication Disability	Dumb, doesn't speak well, Speech impediment	Person with a communication disability

- Take time, relax and listen.
- It's okay to say I don't understand and ask them to repeat the message.
- If a person uses a communication device, ask the person how best to use and respond to it to be an effective communicator.