



Mind Your Language

As the equality agenda evolves so does our understanding of the impact it has on our communities. It is therefore important to keep abreast of how these changes impact on the language we use to refer to people of a particular identity.

What you say or write will have a positive or negative impact on disabled people. Inappropriate language may reinforce negative stereotypes and negative attitudes.

The following list of words/terminology has been developed by disabled people and adopted by organisations of disabled people as well as Government groups in the UK.

Whilst the list is not exhaustive, Equality Link Consultancy recommends that undertake an impact assessment of your policies, procedures and publicity material to ensure that you are not using inappropriate language.

Please contact us for further advice.



Discover the Value of Diversity and Inclusion

The language we use

AVOID / OFFENSIVE	USE / PREFERRED
Victim of	Person who has Person with Person who experienced
Crippled by	Disabled person Person who has Person with
Sufferer Suffering from	Person who has Person with
Afflicted Afflicted by	Person who has Person with
Wheelchair bound	Wheelchair user, person who uses a wheelchair
Invalid	Disabled person
Handicap	Disabled person / impairment
Handicapped person	Disabled person
Disability	Condition / impairment
Spastic	Someone with cerebral palsy
The disabled	Disabled People
The blind	Blind person Visually impaired
The deaf	Deaf people
Deaf and dumb Deaf mute	Deaf or deafened Hearing impaired
Mental handicap	Learning Difficulty
Mute / dumb / dummy	Speech difficulty
Mad / crazy / insane	Mental Health System User/Mental health survivor
Mentally ill	Mental Health Survivor or system user
Mental	Disabled person
Dwarf Midget	Short person Short stature
Deformed	Disfigured
Disabled toilet	Accessible toilet



Mind Your Language – a guide

Knowing what to say and what not to say without understanding the rationale behind the context can lead to people thinking, ‘its political correctness gone mad’, and resist change. As someone once said, “A person inconvenienced against their will is of the same opinion still.” So, by understanding the origin of words and their influence we can start to make sense of these changes.

Below are a few examples illustrating why language associated with disabled people has changed.

The Disabled: This term implies that disabled people are a homogeneous group and separate from the rest of society. Disabled people have many identities and belong to different community groups. For example, a disabled person may be a parent, an employee, young person and gay. **Preferred term: Disabled People/Person.**

The Handicap: This term originates from the Victorian era and has associations with 'cap in hand' and begging. **Preferred term: Disabled People/Person.**

People with Disabilities: this became the preferred term in the 1980's as it sought to place the 'person first' ahead of the impairment. Under the Social Model of Disability this is incorrect as disabled people have impairments and are socially disadvantaged (disabled) by inaccessible environments, negative attitudes and stereotypes. **Preferred term: Disabled People/Person.**



Wheelchair Bound: Many people think of a wheelchair as a burden which impinges on individual's independence. However, for wheelchair users the wheelchair represents 'independence' and 'freedom' and not a 'confining burden'. **Preferred term: Wheelchair User/Person who uses a wheelchair.**

Mental Handicap: People who have experienced mental health problems have no one preferred 'name' by which to be called. The most common terms being 'user' or 'clients' of Mental Health Services. Some people who attend day centres or drop in services like to be called 'members'. The term 'survivor' is not often used, in this area, but it is important to find how the group or person you are dealing with likes to be referred by.