

Person First Language Guide

COMMUNICATING WITH AND ABOUT PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Person-First Language:

We use person-first language for all persons because we believe that each individual is made in the image of God. Especially when working with children, who may not yet have embraced an identity as a person with a disability, we find this gives kids a lens that emphasizes they are a kid first, not whatever disability they may have.

An individual's preference may change over time, such as when an individual prefers to be called *autistic* instead of *a person with autism*. Honoring a person's preference is appropriate and comes from relationship with that person. Person-first language is used by default if such preferences are not known, honoring how God made people each with a unique design.



General Tips:

- ◆ Person-first language is used in all communications, including oral and written.
- ◆ A person or the person's name is always referenced first, with the disability or diagnosis referenced secondarily or not at all.
- ◆ Only reference the disability or diagnosis if it is pertinent to the story.
- ◆ Uses of *typically-abled* or *able-bodied* are not person-first and do not represent neurodiverse communities. Strive to be consistent in the use of person-first language toward all individuals, not just those with disabilities.
- ◆ Whether in conversation or story, begin by describing the person's strengths and gifts.



Additional Resources:

- ◆ Center for Disease Control Guide on Person-First Language
- ◆ National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Person-First Language

Okay

- ◆ Erin, who lives with autism spectrum disorder...
- ◆ Jeremy, a student with Down syndrome...
- ◆ A student who has Down syndrome...
- ◆ Individuals with disabilities
- ◆ Teresa, a wheelchair user...
- ◆ Teresa uses a wheelchair
- ◆ A person with a disability and his peers...
- ◆ Peers who are also second graders...
- ◆ Peers who are neurotypical

Not Okay

- ◆ Autistic students like Erin...
- ◆ Jeremy, who has Down syndrome...
- ◆ A Down syndrome student
- ◆ Disabled people
- ◆ Special needs people
- ◆ Teresa is wheelchair bound
- ◆ Typically-abled