



WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS FOR EQUALITY

**Nova Scotia
Disabled Persons
Commission**

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A major barrier to full social and economic participation by persons with disabilities is attributable to the attitudes and beliefs of society. The language used to describe persons with disabilities and the image that these descriptions portray, whether in media releases, speeches, brochures, or other forms of communications, has a significant impact on establishing and reinforcing societal attitudes towards persons with disabilities.

The Nova Scotia Disabled Persons Commission urges the use of "positive images" in representing persons with disabilities or in reporting on issues of relevance to persons with disabilities. The Commission recommends the focus should be placed upon the person and not the limitation, the ability not the disability, and the promotion of equality and responsibility rather than pity and charity. The use of inappropriate language reinforces the belief in the "helpless plight" of persons with disabilities. Phrases such as "suffering from a handicap", "crippled", or "afflicted with", illustrate the inferiority assumptions of the charitable approach to persons with disabilities.

The use of language leaves a lasting impression upon the audience or reader and misconstrued meanings evolve from the way words are used. Persons who are portrayed as being a "retard", an "idiot", or "spastic" have very little chance in full participation and have, in fact, been dehumanized and devalued as persons. It is understandable that persons who have intellectual disabilities have named their major consumer organization "People First" in response to the significant impact and disadvantage imposed upon them by labelling.

In a similar manner, portraying persons with disabilities who strive for independence and achievement as "courageous", "heroic" and an "inspiration", while more positive in tone, undermine the notion that persons with disabilities undertake "normal" activities.

The inappropriate portrayal of persons with disabilities reinforces the ignorance and the fear felt by the general public who have little or no contact with persons with disabilities. This ignorance and fear leads to the creation of barriers to full participation in society. The elimination of barriers should be based upon the premise of the right to equal participation, not notions of pity, charity, or fear.

Words and expressions should represent persons with a disability in an appropriate, fair and accurate way. In conjunction with the "Decade of the Disabled" (1983-1992), the Status of Disabled Persons Secretariat prepared guidelines in conjunction with individuals, advocacy groups and associations. This collaboration resulted in the development of guidelines for appropriate terminology when referring to persons with disabilities. The Disabled Persons Commission continues to monitor and update these guidelines in order to support the general public, organizations and Government to communicate using "Words and Expressions for Equality".

DO NOT USE	USE INSTEAD ...
Birth defect, congenital defect, deformity	Person with a disability since birth, or person who has a congenital disability
Sightless, visually challenged	Person who is blind, person who is visually impaired
Confined, bound, restricted or dependent on a wheelchair	Person who uses a wheelchair
Cripple, lame	Person with a disability; person with a mobility impairment; person who has arthritis, polio, etc.
Deaf/mute	Person or persons who are deaf, deafened. <i>(Person who is deafened indicates an individual who has lost their hearing later in life).</i>
The Disabled	Person or persons with a disability
Epileptic	Person who has epilepsy
Fit, attack, spell	Seizure
The Handicapped	Person with a disability
The Hard of Hearing	The Disabled
Insane - crazy, deviant, lunatic, maniac, mentally diseased, nuts, psychotic, mad, unsound mind, demented, loony, mental patient, neurotic, psycho, schizophrenic	Person with a mental health disability; person who has schizophrenia; person who has depression; person who is a mental health consumer. "Insane" means an unsound mind <i>(should only be used in a strictly legal sense).</i>
Invalid	Person with a disability. "Invalid" means not valid.
Mentally retarded <i>(defective, idiot, imbecile, retarded, mongoloid, feeble minded, moron, simple).</i>	Person with an intellectual disability; person who is intellectually impaired.
Normal	Person who is not disabled; able-bodied

DO NOT USE	USE INSTEAD ...
Patient	Use only when referring to the relationship between a doctor and a client. (<i>Hospitals and doctors have patients.</i>)
Suffers from (<i>afflicted by and/or stricken with</i>)	Person with a disability (<i>a disability is not synonymous with suffering</i>).
Victim of cerebral palsy, polio, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.	Person with a disability; person with mobility impairment; person who has cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, etc.

The terms paraplegic, quadriplegic and amputee are used and accepted by persons with those disabilities.

Appropriate terms are still being developed. The terms referred to in this document are currently in use and are accepted by persons with disabilities.