

## WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

### The DO's AND DON'T's

1. Always talk about people, not the disability. Say “persons with disabilities.” Do not say “the disabled.”
2. Never use words like “cripple” (“crip”), “afflicted,” “confined,” “victim,” “wheelchair-bound,” “spastic,” “invalid,” “retard,” or “gimp.” These are all first class insults, which may provoke an unwelcome response.
3. The commonly preferred term to use to describe a person in a wheelchair or a person who uses crutches is “a person with a mobility impairment.”
4. The term “person who is hearing impaired” is an acceptable way of describing a person with a hearing loss. If the person has no hearing, the person may be described as “profoundly hearing impaired” or “deaf.” NEVER say “deaf and dumb.” It is denigrating as well as not true.
5. “Person who is visually (or vision) impaired” is the commonly preferred term to describe a person with sight or vision problems and loss. A person who has no sight whatsoever may be described as “blind.”
6. A person with two limbs paralyzed (usually the legs) is a person who is a paraplegic (“para”). A person whose four limbs are paralyzed is a quadriplegic (“quad”).
7. “Seizure” is an acceptable term whereas “fit,” “spells” or “spastic” should not be used.
8. A person with a muscular or neurological condition should be described as a person who has or who had the particular condition, e.g., a person who has muscular dystrophy or who had a stroke. Do not describe the person as a “victim” or a “sufferer.” That is a put down.
9. Person who cannot speak or who cannot speak clearly should be described as “a person with a speech impairment” or as a person who cannot speak. Do not say “mute”, “dumb”, or “dummy.”
10. The term “hidden disability” is used to refer to a disabling condition or impairment, which is not apparent from looking at a person. It is an acceptable way to describe a person who is hearing impaired, a person whose seizures are under control, or a person who has a prosthesis which is not visible.
11. The terms “idiot,” “moron,” “slow,” “simple minded,” “mongoloid,” or “deficient” should never be used. The correct term traditionally has been “mentally retarded,” though now the term “mentally disabled” is also used.

12. “Emotionally disabled” is a new term coming into vogue to describe a person with mental illness or receiving psychological or psychiatric treatment. Do not use terms such as “psycho,” “nut,” or “former mental patient.” “Physically challenged” is a new term being used for persons with physical disabilities.
13. The word “normal” is not viewed as a positive or even neutral word. The terms, “able-bodied,” “AB,” or TAB” are used to refer to able-bodied person. The latter is not a reference to a soft drink but is an acronym for “temporarily able-bodied,” designed to illustrate how fleetingly illusory health or an able body can be.
14. Don’t say “handicapped toilet,” “handicapped parking,” or “disabled seating.” The toilet, space, or seat are not limited. They are for use by persons with disabilities. The best way to refer to the item would be “accessible toilet,” “parking for persons with disabilities,” or “accessible seating.”
15. Avoid the cutesy adjectives when referring to a particular person with a disability. Words such as “brave,” “courageous,” or “inspirational” tend to foster the stereotypical myths.
16. Avoid phraseology like “AIDS victims” for the same reasons noted under DOs and DON’Ts No. 8, above.
17. “AIDS Carrier” is stigmatizing and reminiscent of the typhoid hysteria. The correct term depending upon the person’s condition is “person with AIDS” (noted as “PWA”) or “HIV positive” (sometimes “HIV +”) person.
18. Remember you are interacting with individuals who may have a preference in how they are addressed. Remember to ask them. Remember it is the individual, the person, and not their disability, with whom you are interacting.