



# Disability Equality Staff Training



## **Fact Sheet:** ***Terminology***

This area of disability equality probably causes more personal anguish for those working with disabled people than any other area, after all, most if not all do not want to offend anybody by using the wrong language. It is often said that “we don’t know what to say because it is always changing”. The reality is that the preferred terms in this fact sheet have not dramatically changed in the last 15 years.

This terminology guidance contained within this fact sheet is to provide a baseline to work from. It is preferred terminology, which reflects a social model approach that service providers need to adopt. This guidance comes from large representative organisations of disabled people such as Disabled Peoples International and BCOOP (British Council of Disabled People). Disabled people realise that there needs to be terminology relating to them in certain situations, it is empowering that they decide what that language is to be.

It is important to promote preferred positive language and terminology but not get bogged down with it. The important thing is to look at people’s individual needs and the barriers that exist for them when trying to access your service.

You will come across many people, disabled and non-disabled, who use language we advocate avoiding. Firstly they are unlikely to know about the social model but also may choose to be referred to in a particular way. Where it is not appropriate to challenge (sometimes it will be) promote the use of preferred terminology through your own use and certainly in any marketing material that is produced.

Of course we will get it wrong sometimes, after all this can be a good way to learn. However what is important is that we learn from our experiences and do not become “defensive” when somebody has told us their preference. One way would be to just say sorry and leave it at that. Always remember that if somebody is willing to tell you and you then react adversely, you could give the message that you do not care about what the disabled person thinks or feels, which is usually the opposite of what we want to portray.



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Preferred terminology is about being socially aware, respecting people, and appreciating that what we say and how we say it can have a profound effect on people.

	Terminology	Prefer	Avoid	Explanation	Preferred Terminology
1	the disabled		✓	Grouping everyone together in a disempowering way, reflecting medical model.	Preferred term is a disabled person / disabled people.
2	she is a stroke victim		✓	Disabled people are neither victims or tragic.	Preferred term is She has had a stroke.
3	spastic		✓	In dictionary medical term – a form of cerebral palsy. Used in a negative way. Name calling, playground culture.	Preferred term is a disabled person
4	....has cerebral palsy	✓		Preferred term.	
5	the deaf		✓	As above with The disabled.	Preferred term is people with hearing impairments.
6	.... has learning difficulties	✓		Preferred term.	
7	....is partially sighted		✓	'Sighted' is based on the concept of 'normality' therefore being partially sighted is deviation from normality.	Preferred term is people with visual impairments
8	....is handicapped		✓	Outdated considered offensive due to connotations with begging i.e. cap in hand. Preferred term is disabled people.	Preferred term is a disabled person / disabled people.



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	Terminology	Prefer	Avoid	Explanation	Preferred Terminology
9	....is wheelchair bound		✓	Implies person spends all their time in the wheelchair and cannot get out, even that they are 'tied' to their chairs. Disabled people do not sleep in their chairs. They use the chair to go about their everyday activities.	Preferred term is wheelchair user.
10	a person with a disability		✓	Medical model perspective implies a person's impairment or medical condition causes the disability. You firmly attach the disability to the person with this phrase when it's not it's with society.	Preferred term is disabled people / a disabled person.
11	....suffers from		✓	Most disabled people are not suffering but 'have' a particular impairment. Disempowering.	Preferred term is has. Eg. she/he has cerebral palsy
12	able-bodied		✓	Implies disabled peoples bodies are 'unable'. Individual model perspective.	Preferred term non-disabled people.

There are times when you might need to describe a person's impairment, in which case for the most part the terms below will be acceptable:

- Mental health service users
- Mental health issues
- People with learning difficulties
- People with visual impairments (blind if totally blind)
- People with hearing impairments (deaf if profoundly deaf)
- People with speech impairments



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