

# *People First Language:* Guidelines for Public Awareness

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**The correct name of this diagnosis is Down syndrome.** There is no apostrophe (Down). The “s” in syndrome is not capitalized (syndrome).

**An individual with Down syndrome is an individual first and foremost.** The emphasis should be on the person, not the disability. A person with Down syndrome has many other qualities and attributes that can be used to describe them.

**Words can create barriers.** Recognize that a child is “a child with Down syndrome,” or that an adult is “an adult with Down syndrome.” Children with Down syndrome grow into adults with Down syndrome; they do not remain eternal children. Adults enjoy activities and companionship with other adults.

**It is important to use the correct terminology.** A person “has” Down syndrome, rather than “suffers from,” “is a victim of,” “is diseased with” or “afflicted by.”

**Each person has his/her own unique strengths, capabilities and talents.** Try not to use the clichés that are so common when describing an individual with Down syndrome. To assume all people have the same characteristics or abilities is demeaning. Also, it reinforces the stereotype that “all people with Down syndrome are the same.”

**Respect the individual’s preferences** when he or she self-identifies and uses identity-first terminology, such as “I am autistic”.

## **Here are some basic guidelines for using people-first language:**

- Put people first, not their disability
  - A “person with a disability,” not a “disabled person”
  - A “child with autism,” not an “autistic child”
- Use emotionally neutral expressions
  - A person “with” cerebral palsy, not “afflicted with” cerebral palsy
  - An individual who had a stroke, not a stroke “victim”
  - A person “has” Down syndrome, not “suffers from” Down syndrome
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations
  - A person “uses a wheelchair,” not “wheelchair-bound”
  - A child “receives special education services,” not “in special ed”
- Adopt preferred language
  - A “cognitive disability” or “intellectual disability” is preferred over “mentally retarded”
  - “Typically developing” or “typical” is preferred over “normal”
  - “Accessible” parking space or hotel room is preferred over “handicapped”