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Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. SAMHSA/CSAT Treatment Improvement Protocols. Rockville (MD): Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (US); 1993-.

Bookshelf ID: NBK25819

Appendix C—How To Refer to People With Disabilities

The terms in the following list are the preferred words used to portray people with disabilities in a positive manner. This list is adapted from *Guidelines for Reporting and Writing about People with Disabilities* from the Research and Training Center on Independent Living (Research and Training Center on Independent Living, 1996). With a few modifications the text is the same as in the Guidelines.

1. **AIDS.** Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, an infectious disease resulting in the loss of the body's immune system to ward off infections. The disease is caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). A person can test positive for HIV without displaying the symptoms of any illnesses, which usually develop up to 10 years later. Preferred: *people living with HIV, people with AIDS, or living with AIDS.*
2. **Adventitious disability.** A disability acquired after birth. The time of onset of a disability may result in or be affected by a substance use disorder.
3. **Blind.** A condition in which a person has a loss of vision for ordinary life purposes. *Visually impaired* is the generic term used by some individuals to refer to all degrees of vision loss. Use *boy who is blind, girl who is visually impaired, or man who has low vision.*
4. **Brain injury.** A condition where there is long-term or temporary disruption in brain function resulting from injury to the brain. Difficulties with the cognitive, physical, emotional, or social functioning may occur. Use *person with a brain injury, woman who has sustained brain injury, or boy with an acquired brain injury.* It is also referred to as traumatic brain injury.
5. **Congenital disability.** A disability that has existed since birth but is not necessarily hereditary. The term birth defect is inappropriate.
6. **Deaf.** A profound degree of hearing loss that prevents understanding speech aurally. Hard of hearing refers to mild and moderate hearing loss that may or may not be corrected with amplification. The Deaf Community is a group of people with shared experiences and values, for whom American Sign Language is often a first language and the language of choice.
7. **Developmental disability.** Any mental or physical disability starting before the age of 22 and continuing indefinitely. It limits one or more major life activities such as self-care, language, learning, mobility, self-direction, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency. This category includes individuals with mental retardation, cerebral palsy, autism, epilepsy (and other seizure disorders), sensory impairments, congenital disabilities, traumatic injuries, and conditions caused by disease (polio, muscular dystrophy, etc.), and it may be the result of multiple disabilities. People often use this terminology to refer to a person with mental retardation.
8. **Disfigurement.** Physical changes caused by burn, trauma, disease, or congenital problems.
9. **Down Syndrome.** A chromosome disorder which usually causes a delay in physical, intellectual, and language development and often results in mental retardation. *Mongol or mongoloid* are unacceptable terms.
10. **Handicap.** A condition or barrier imposed by society, the environment, or by one's own self. *Handicap* is synonymous with *barrier* and not a synonym for disability. Some individuals prefer *inaccessible* or *not accessible* to describe social and environmental barriers. Handicap can be used when citing laws and situations, but should not be used to describe a disability. Do not refer to people with disabilities as *the handicapped* or *handicapped people*. Say, *the building is not accessible for a wheelchair-user. The stairs are a handicap for her.*
11. **Learning disability.** A permanent condition that affects the way individuals with average or above-average intelligence take in, retain, and express information. Some groups prefer *specific learning disability*, because it emphasizes that only certain learning processes are affected. Do not say *slow learner, retarded*, etc. Use *person with a learning disability.*

12. **Mental disability.** The Federal Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) lists four categories under mental disability: psychiatric disability, retardation, learning disability, or cognitive impairment.
13. **Mental retardation.** Substantial intellectual delay which requires environmental or personal supports to live independently. Mental retardation is manifested by below average intellectual functioning in two or more life areas (work, education, daily living, etc.) and is present before the age of 18. Preferred: *people with mental retardation*. Mental retardation is commonly referred to as a developmental disability.
14. **Nondisabled.** Appropriate term for people without disabilities. *Normal, able-bodied, healthy, or whole* are inappropriate because they imply that people who are disabled are not these things.
15. **Psychiatric disability.** Acceptable terms are *people with psychiatric disabilities, psychiatric illnesses, emotional disorders, or mental disabilities*. The following terms are pejorative: *crazy, maniac, lunatic, demented* and *psycho*. *Psychotic, schizophrenic, neurotic*, and other specific terms should be used only in proper context and should be checked carefully for medical and legal accuracy.
16. **Seizure.** An involuntary muscular contraction, a brief impairment or loss of consciousness, etc., resulting from a neurological condition such as epilepsy or from an acquired brain injury. Rather than *epileptic*, use *girl with epilepsy* or *boy with a seizure disorder*. The term *convulsion* should be used only for seizures involving contractions of the entire body. *Fit* is a pejorative term.
17. **Small/short stature.** Adults under 4'10". Use *persons of small (or short) stature*. Do not refer to people as *dwarfs* or *midgets*. *Dwarfism* is an accepted medical term, but it should not be used as general terminology. Some groups prefer *little people*. However, that implies a less than full, adult status in society.
18. **Spastic.** A muscle with sudden abnormal and involuntary spasm. It is not an appropriate term for describing someone with cerebral palsy or a neurological disorder. Muscles are spastic, not people.
19. **Speech disorder.** A condition in which a person has limited or difficult speech patterns. Use *child who has a speech disorder*. For a person with no verbal speech capability, use *woman without speech*. Do not use *mute* or *dumb*.
20. **Spinal cord injury.** A condition in which there has been permanent damage to the spinal cord. *Quadriplegia* denotes substantial or total loss of function in all four extremities. *Paraplegia* refers to substantial or total loss of function in the lower part of the body only. Say *man with paraplegia, woman who is paralyzed, or person with a physical disability*.
21. **Stroke.** An interruption of blood to brain. Hemiplegia (paralysis on one side) may result. *Stroke survivor* is preferred over *stroke victim*.
22. **Substance dependence.** Patterns of use that result in significant impairment in at least three life areas (family, employment, health, etc.) over any 12-month period. Substance dependence is generally characterized by impaired control over consumption, preoccupation with the substance, and denial of impairment in life areas. Substance dependence may include physiological dependence (tolerance, withdrawal). Although such terms as *alcoholic* and *addict* are medically acceptable, they may be pejorative to some individuals. Acceptable terms are *people who are substance dependent* or *people who are alcohol dependent*. Individuals who are substance dependent and currently abstaining from substances are considered to be *in recovery*.