



TALKING ABOUT DISABILITY

Introduction

Many people worry about the appropriate words to use when talking about disability. Using the wrong terms can cause offence and one may appear prejudiced. At Soundabout, we encourage the correct use of terms so that we can communicate clearly and effectively, with a commitment to equality and inclusion.

The Social Model versus the Medical Model

The 'social model' terminology is the accepted model of disability for all UK government departments, local authorities, the British Paralympic Association and the International Paralympic Committee. It is supported by the Equality Act 2010 and aims to ensure that the language we use is up-to-date and clearly understood. The social model was created by disabled people themselves.

The 'medical model' describes disability as the individual's inability to do something. It can single out a disabled person as different and focus on a person's loss of physical or sensory ability, rather than on what they can do and how they can be included. Terms that label a person according to what they are unable to do (handicapped, crippled, wheelchair-bound or spastic) belong to the medical model as do euphemisms that focus on loss of ability (special, person with disability or differently-abled).

The Importance of these terms

The social model defines a reduced physical, sensory or cognitive ability as a person's impairment rather than their disability. It characterises a disability as being caused by a barrier that prevents a person with an impairment from living independently rather than a person's impairment itself. For example, within the social model, a wheelchair user who is unable to use a flight of stairs is disabled by the stairs and not the impairment which means that they need to use a wheelchair. The social model requires reasonable adjustments to be made to eliminate these barriers which disable people with impairments and describes a disabled person as having 'additional needs arising from their impairment'.

Definitions of Disability

The legal definition of disability can be found in the Equality Act 2010. It defines a disabled person as someone with a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. Any person meeting this definition is entitled to the legal protections and entitlements set out in the Act.

Some people with an impairment (including significant or severe impairments) do not self-identify as disabled. In particular, younger people, people with a hearing impairment and sports people often do not routinely describe themselves as 'disabled people' and might be offended if described this way by others. If you are endeavouring to reach or identify all disabled people, the phrase 'people who may need additional help and disabled people' may be more appropriate.

Brief Language Guidelines

- The phrase **disabled person** or **disabled people** is generally considered a positive one.
- The term **impairment** is used when referring specifically to an individual or group's medical condition or health condition.
- People with cognitive impairment are also known as **learning disabled people** or **people with a learning difficulty**.
- A mental health condition is also known as a **mental health impairment**.
- People who have a **mobility impairment** or are mobility-impaired have difficulty moving around due to problems in their environment which obstruct their independent movement, for example, steps and kerbs.
- A person who uses a wheelchair is known as a **wheelchair user** and a person who uses a walking aid such as a stick or frame is known as an **ambulant disabled person**.
- **Non-disabled** is the term used to refer to people who do not have an impairment.

TERMS TO AVOID	PREFERRED TERMS
Victim of...	Person who has...
Crippled by...	Person who has...
Suffering from...	Person who has...
Afflicted by...	Person who has...
Wheelchair bound	Wheelchair user
Invalid	Disabled person
Mental	Disabled person
Handicapped, the handicapped	Disabled person
The disabled	Disabled person
Spastic	Person with cerebral palsy
Deaf and dumb	Deaf or hearing impaired person
Cripple or crippled	Disabled person or person with impaired or reduced mobility
The blind	Blind or visually impaired person
The deaf	Deaf people or hearing impaired people
Mentally handicapped, backward, dull	Person with learning difficulty
Mongol	Person with learning difficulty
Retarded, idiot, imbecile, feeble-minded	Person with a developmental impairment or developmentally-impaired person
Mute, dummy	Speech impaired person or person with a speech impairment
Mentally ill, mental patient, insane	Person with mental health impairment
Abnormal	Disabled person
Patient	Person (except in a specifically medical context)
Special needs	Additional needs
Special	Disabled person or person with additional needs
Service User	Disabled person