

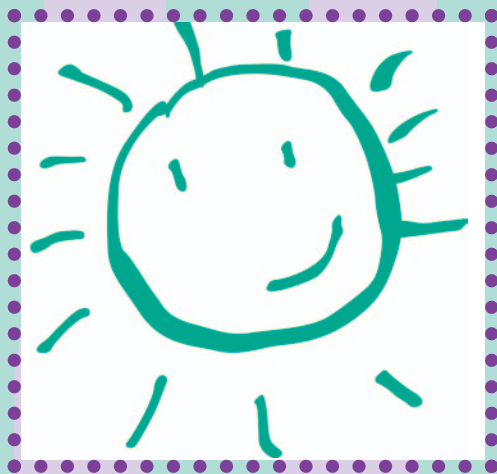
elementary
guide to
understanding
disabilities

People
First



North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities

www.nc-ddc.org



People First K-5

Have you ever noticed that other people don't look just like you do? Or talk just like you? Or think just like you? Or act just like you?

Everybody is different. Even identical twins aren't exactly the same. Each person is unique—one of a kind.

People come in all shapes and sizes. They have different hair styles or skin colors or heights. Some people are quiet and others may talk a lot. There are those who like to play sports and others who are into music.

There are lots of ways to be different.

Sometimes, a person's difference is called a disability. A disability can be many things—it may mean that a person's body doesn't work in the same way that other people's bodies work. It may mean someone can't hear or see or speak.

It can also mean that someone has a harder time learning new things.

People with disabilities might use a wheelchair or use their hands to talk to their friends, or they might sound or look different. Sometimes you can't even tell if a person has a disability—someone who has asthma or seizures doesn't look like he or she has a disability.

People First K-5 is for kids with or without disabilities, as well as for the adults that work with them. This document will help you learn language you can use when talking about your own disability or someone else's. There are also tips that will help you feel more comfortable with each other as you play and go to school together.

Remember, we are all *people first*. Cherish and celebrate our differences. It's what makes each of us special.

Mark Ezzell, Chair
NC Council on Developmental Disabilities



Talking about disabilities

Sometimes the way people think about others with disabilities is based on how they hear people talk about people with disabilities—the words they use and what they say.

For example, have you ever heard someone say something mean or teasing about a person with a disability? Or have you heard someone being called a name—such as “retard”—as an insult? This kind of language can hurt people’s feelings, whether they have a disability or not.

One of the ways you can let people with disabilities—and all minority groups—know they are accepted and included is to use respectful language.

This kind of language is called people first language. When you use people first language, you are focusing on the person and not the disability. If you are using people first language, then instead of talking about “the disabled” or “the handicapped,” you would say, “people with disabilities.” You

would not say, “Mary is blind,” because Mary is much more than that. You would say, “Mary is a ‘person’ who is blind” when you use people first language.

Remember, the person is not the disability. While your friends—or yourself—may have a disability, that’s not who they are; it’s just one part of the whole person. They are funny, smart, fast, have beautiful hair, love games—there are so many other ways to describe people. When you talk about a friend without disabilities, do you describe him as, “That’s Joe and he doesn’t have a disability”? Probably not.



When you do talk about a person’s disability, there are right and wrong ways of doing it. The following are some of the right—people first—ways of talking about disabilities and some of the wrong ways.

People First language

Old stereotypes/ disrespectful language

| | |
|---|--|
| People or individuals with disabilities | The handicapped, special needs, challenged; afflicted with a disability; suffers from a disability |
| Samantha, who uses a wheelchair | The girl in the wheelchair; wheelchair-bound |
| A woman with paraplegia, a man that has quadriplegia | A paraplegic, a quadriplegic; cripp, a cripple |
| A class for children with disabilities | A handicapped class |
| Person without a disability | A normal person |
| Person with mental illness | The mentally ill; the emotionally disturbed; insane; crazy; demented; psycho; lunatic |
| Accessible bus/parking space | Handicapped bus/parking space |
| People with intellectual disabilities; people with cognitive disabilities | Retarded people, mentally retarded |
| A person who has Down syndrome or a person with Down syndrome | Down's kids, Mongoloid |
| She is a little person, or she is of short stature | She's a dwarf/midget |
| He has a brain injury | He is brain damaged |

There are a few exceptions. Some people with disabilities choose not to use people first language. For example, some people with hearing impairments refer to themselves as Deaf with a capital "D" because they consider themselves a minority with their own culture and language, called American Sign Language. The best thing to do is to ask what words the person prefers to use. It's a great conversation starter!

What should I say?

The most important thing is to be yourself. Children with disabilities are just like children without disabilities. They also want to study hard, have fun and play with their friends. Talk about things that you and your friends are interested in. Don't worry about using ordinary phrases, such as "see you later" to a person who is blind or "got to be running along" to someone who can't walk.

In addition to using people first language, here are some other suggestions for talking with people with disabilities.

* Talk about abilities instead of limitations. Saying, "Caroline is wheelchair-bound," makes it sound like she can't do much. Instead, you could say, "Caroline uses a wheelchair to get around," which emphasizes her ability to get places. Unless it's really relevant, don't even refer to the person's disability. The best way to describe Caroline may be to say, "Caroline is a great artist," which focuses on one of her abilities.

* Don't use words that imply a person with a disability is afflicted with or suffers from their disability. Also avoid referring to them as special or exceptional.

* Don't talk about "fixing" or "making the person better." They might feel just fine, just

like a red-haired person might like how her red hair makes her different.

* Don't assume a person with a disability can't do things. They might use assistive devices or technology to talk, to walk, or even to drive a car. They might have strengths in many different areas.

* When you're talking with someone with a hearing loss, it's okay to tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand to get his or her attention.

* When talking with someone who reads lips, talk in a normal tone of voice—don't try to talk very slowly or exaggerate the movement of your lips—and use facial expressions and gestures to help the person understand what you are saying.

* If you're talking to someone with a speech disability—perhaps you have a grandparent who has had a stroke and now she speaks more slowly or her speech is slurred—give the person extra time to talk and try not to rush her. Be patient and don't speak for the person.

* Sometimes you might be talking to someone who uses an interpreter, a translator or a personal assistant. Look at the person with the disability when you're talking to her, not the interpreter, translator or personal assistant.

How should I act?

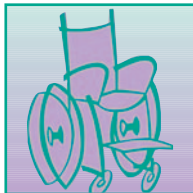
Again, be yourself. If you don't, both you and the other person will feel uncomfortable and nervous. But here are some tips that will help you as play and study with your friends with disabilities.

* If you want to help someone with a disability—perhaps it looks like he needs help pushing his wheelchair up a ramp—ask first before giving help. Many people with disabilities are very capable of taking care of their own needs.

* If you're with someone who uses a guide dog or some other kind of service animal, do not pet or talk to the animal. These animals are working and shouldn't be distracted.

* Don't touch a person's body or any equipment that person uses—such as a wheelchair, cane or walker.

* When you talk to someone in a wheelchair, talk directly to the person. Try to be at eye level, but don't kneel next to the wheelchair. If you need to, take a couple of steps back so the person doesn't have to strain his neck to look up at you.



Who are people with disabilities?

In the United States, there are 49 million people with disabilities. That means if you divide the whole country into groups of five people, one person in each group will have a disability. People with disabilities make up the largest minority group in the entire United States.

Some people are born with disabilities. Other people develop disabilities later in life, either suddenly, through an accident, or slowly, as a result of an illness or aging. Disability can happen to anyone. It is said that about 60 percent of Americans—more than half of us—will have a disability at some point in our lives.

The lives of people with disabilities are not very different from people without disabilities. People with disabilities go to school, play, get married, work, have families, do laundry, go shopping, take vacations, laugh, cry, get angry, and have dreams and goals.

Games and Activities

Activity #1: What's it like to...?

(Can be done in tandem with activity #2)
How does it feel to have a disability? This activity allows young children who do not have disabilities (or who have different disabilities) to empathize with their peers who have disabilities, or who have disabilities different from their own.

Time

60 minutes

Supplies

Blindfolds, sunglasses, bandannas or scarves, ear plugs, earmuffs, foam rubber or bubble wrap sheets to fit over arms and legs, scissors, duct tape, wheelchairs (may be obtained ahead of time from a doctor's office, hospital, nursing home, school nurse, or community center), crutches or a walker, paper and string for making signs, hole punch


Possible disabilities

- **Limited mobility:** Use varying amounts of bubble wrap or foam rubber and duct tape around the joints (knees, elbows, wrists) to simulate arthritis, multiple sclerosis, etc.
- **Visual impairments:** Use sunglasses, bandannas or scarves to totally or partially obscure vision.
- **Hearing impairments:** Use earplugs and/or earmuffs to simulate partial or severe hearing impairments.
- **Physical disability:** Have children sit in manual wheelchairs or use crutches or a walker.

Activity

Randomly assign each child a different disability or, in a larger group, varying degrees of disabilities. Have the children






write the name of their disability on a piece of paper and punch two holes to hang the sign around their necks.

Decide upon group or individual tasks to try out living with a disability: getting from a classroom to the bathroom, accomplishing a class project, etc. Have the children assist each other throughout the tasks.

Share what happened

Ask the children the following questions:

- * How did it feel to have a “disability?” What did you learn?
 - * What did you have to change? What was easier or harder?
 - * Did you notice you had to rely on other senses or develop new abilities?
 - * Did this change the way you feel about what it’s like to have a disability?
- 



Activity #2: Disability etiquette

(Can be done in tandem with activity #1)

Do you know the best way to communicate with someone who has a disability? When should you offer assistance to someone in a wheelchair? This activity offers children a way to learn about communicating with people who are different.



Time

45 minutes – 1.5 hours, depending on the number of groups





Supplies

Notebook paper for each child, pencils, timer, note cards


Activity

Create five disability note cards from the ideas listed on the next page and divide participants into five equal groups. Assign a card to each group to act out in a skit or practice. After 10 or 15 minutes, each group performs two skits: one modeling proper etiquette and one showing improper etiquette.






1 Note card #1: General etiquette for people with disabilities



Speaking directly to someone with a disability: Don't talk to a person's companion, personal assistant or friend. Instead, talk directly to the person. If you don't know whether or not the person shakes hands, you can ask, "Shall we shake hands?" (You can touch the person on the shoulder as a greeting if they cannot shake hands.) Don't mention or ask about the disability unless it's relevant to the conversation or the person with the disability refers to it. Be patient, especially when someone has a speech disability. Never pretend to understand someone. Ask the person to repeat something, or offer a pen and paper to write down the information. It's completely fine to offer assistance to someone with a disability in a dignified manner, but don't begin assisting unless it is first accepted.



Note card #2: Intellectual disabilities (also know as cognitive disabilities)




When meeting someone with an intellectual disability, be patient. Take time to allow the person to put his or her


thoughts into words. Speak in simple terms and precise language. Don't use baby talk. Ask direct questions. Verify a response by repeating the information. People with intellectual disabilities may say "yes" to a question they don't understand to please the person, so make sure the other person really understands the question. Give clear instructions and don't give too many instructions at once.



Note card #3: Mobility limitations



Don't touch a person's mobility equipment or assistive devices (they're part of his or her personal space). Don't kneel to talk to someone in a wheelchair, but rather, stand back a couple of steps so the person doesn't have to strain his or her neck to speak to you. Sit in a chair if at all possible, especially if the conversation will be long. When giving directions to a place, first consider if there are any mobility limitations such as stairs, hills, or curbs without curb cuts. When going to a place together, such as a restaurant, find out in advance if the building is accessible.



Note card #4: Hearing impairments

To get the attention of a person who is deaf or has a hearing impairment, establish eye contact, tap the person on the shoulder or wave your hand gently. Indicate to the person if you know sign language or find out if he or she would prefer writing notes or lip reading. Keep your voice at a normal level and, if the person is lip reading, make sure you're not doing anything distracting such as chewing gum or putting your hands in front of your face. Maintain eye contact with the person who has a hearing impairment, even if he or she is using an interpreter.

Note card #5: Visual impairments

Identify yourself when you greet a person with a visual impairment. Let the person know who else is present by identifying or introducing each person. When you leave, excuse yourself and let the person know when you return. When guiding a person with a visual impairment, allow him or her to take your arm at or about the elbow and walk slightly ahead. Point

out any physical obstacles. Be specific when describing the location of objects, using an imaginary clock to point things out. For example: "There is a parked car at 4 o'clock and two steps up at 12 o'clock." Don't pet or distract a guide dog unless the owner says it is off duty and allowed to be petted. The dog is working to ensure its owner's safety and should not be distracted.

Share what happened

- * Why is it important to use proper etiquette when interacting with people with disabilities?
- * How would you feel if you had a disability and someone used improper etiquette with you?
- * How will you treat a person with a disability in the future?



People First

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If you liked this guide, have suggestions or need more copies in English or Spanish drop us a line at the NCCDD.

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