



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



Disability Communications

TIPS

The following tips
promote positive images
of people with disabilities
in communications materials.

Photo by: Karen Johnson Lassner,
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FIVE TIPS

for *Communicating about Persons with Disabilities*

1

USE POSITIVE AND APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE

Use language that empowers. Focus on ability, not disability, deficit or loss.

Avoid terms that imply disease, sickness, abnormality or other negative images, such as handicapped, disabled, crippled, impaired or challenged.

Avoid group designations such as “the disabled.”

2

INCLUDE PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE MIX

Include positive images of persons with disabilities as part of your diverse group in photos, public service announcements and success stories.

Don't single out persons with disabilities. Include them!

3

EMBODY THE PHRASE, “NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US” IN ALL USAID WORK

Include persons with disabilities in conversations about USAID's work.

Reach out to Disabled People's Organizations (DPOs) and invite them to share their views.

4

KNOW APPROPRIATE LOCAL TERMINOLOGY IN ALL LANGUAGES

Learn and use appropriate disability terminology in the local language in every country; seek guidance from local DPOs — they can help you!

5

FOCUS ON THE PERSON, NOT THE DISABILITY

Use **person-first** language when referring to a person with a disability.

Use phrases like *a person with a disability*, *a woman who is blind*, *a man with Down Syndrome*. At the same time, be aware that some individuals and communities of persons with disabilities prefer **identity-first** language (Autistic person or Deaf Person) over person-first language (person with autism, person who is Deaf).

WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK:

It's OK to ask a person with disability what language is most appropriate.

EASY REFERENCE GUIDE: this list is not exhaustive. When in doubt, ask!

Affirmative Phrases	Negative Phrases
a person with a disability people/persons with disabilities	(the) handicapped, (the) disabled, PWD(s), crippled, invalid, retarded, physically challenged, differently abled, impaired
has [name of condition or impairment]	afflicted by, suffers from, victim of
disability prevalence	disability burden
a person without a disability	able-bodied; normal; typical
a person who uses a wheelchair; a wheelchair user; a wheelchair rider	confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound
a person with a learning disability	mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, slow, below average
a person with cerebral palsy	spastic
a person with a psychosocial disability	mental patient, insane, mad, crazy
a person who is deaf or hard of hearing; Deaf or Hard of Hearing *	deaf and dumb; deaf-mute; hearing impaired
a person who is blind, partially sighted or has low vision	the blind; visually impaired
a person who is deaf-blind (this is preferred over "deaf and blind")	
a person who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression	an epileptic, diabetic, depressive, or person who has fits, spells, attacks
a little person	dwarf; midget

* Around the world, deaf and hard of hearing people (D/HH) are diverse. It is important to note that D/HH people who use sign language consider themselves to be part of a linguistic minority and members of the Deaf Community. This distinction is made by capitalizing the "D" in "Deaf" and "H" in "Hard of Hearing" — for example, Deaf/Hard of Hearing or D/HH.

“First of all, we are people. Don’t look at the disability...”

...My name is Bárbara Alessandra Ventura Castillo. I’m from Perú and am 32 years old. I was born with Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenita (a physical disability that causes decreased flexibility in one’s joints), but it hasn’t been an obstacle to defending and promoting the human rights of people with disabilities in different spaces. I have sent positive messages about people with disabilities in the media since 2010 and I can actually see changes in the appropriate language. My work has been recognized by the government of Perú through the Ministry of Women, Municipality of Lima, Congress of the Republic and other institutions. I had the wonderful opportunity to represent my country in Mobility International USA’s *Women’s Institute on Leadership and Disability 2013*, the Independent Living Course for people with disabilities in Japan 2013 and in the Economic Empowerment for Women in El Salvador 2015. Through la Asociación Luchando Contra Viento y Marea I have founded, I will make changes for real inclusion of people with disabilities.”

- BÁRBARA VENTURA from Perú,
Participant in the USAID-funded Women’s Institute on Leadership and Disability (WILD), Founding Partner and President of La Asociación Luchando Contra Viento y Marea (Association for Struggling Against All Odds)

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