

Inclusive Language and Imagery

Appendix

- Disability is the loss, limitation or denial of rights by society, to a point where the individual is restricted or excluded from taking part in society. Disability is an experience, not a medical condition
- A Disabled Person, has an impairment or impairments, not a disability
- BSLI, means British Sign Language Interpreter
- Neurodivergent, as a term, covers conditions such as autism, dyslexia, learning difficulties/disabilities, brain injury.
- Deaf people, who use a capital D, are those who are culturally Deaf (using sign language as their first language). Most people with hearing impairments are deaf and denoted by using a lower case 'd' [deaf] and use voiced language. d/Deaf people will use a variety of ways to communicate – such as lip reading [requiring lip speaker support], use of hearing loops, captioning, or Sign Language Interpretation.
- Impairment/s, are conditions in which a part of a person's mind, senses or body are diminished. A person living with impairments are defined as having factors that impact their access in daily life activities.
- People with mobility impairments have a variety of reasons for level access. They may be wheelchair users, some may prefer to transfer from their wheelchair into seats, some may walk a few steps, they may have degenerative health conditions, some can walk with crutches or a walking stick, or use motability scooters or may have no visible signs as to what they may have mobility requirements
- Protected Characteristics, are nine personal characteristics or situations that cannot be used as a reason to discriminate against some or treat them unfairly according to anti-discriminatory law; In the UK's Single Equalities Act 2010, these are defined as: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnerships, religion & belief, pregnancy & maternity, race, sex, and sexual orientation

- Intersectionality is the acknowledgement that everyone embodies multiple characteristics and has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and we must consider everything and anything that can marginalise people – gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc.
- The Social Model of Disability, is an acknowledged way of viewing society, developed by disabled people. It says people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment/s or differences and helps us recognise barriers that make life harder for disabled people. Removing these barriers creates equity and supports disabled people towards more independence, choice and control.

How people are represented, described or referred to can have considerable impact on how they feel about themselves and how they are perceived by the public, employers and service providers.

Language guidelines

Not everyone will agree on everything but there is general agreement on some basic guidelines.

Person First or Identity First Language?

Person-first language is often used in professional settings. It means saying “person with a disability,” rather than “disabled person.” The thinking is that by putting the person first, people will focus on the person rather than defining them solely by their disability.

However, many disabled people actively prefer not to use person-first language. Instead, they opt for identity-first e.g. disabled person. This emphasises how people with impairments are disabled by barriers in society i.e. a Social Model understanding of disability. This places the responsibility on society to remove disabling barriers and be fully inclusive of people with impairments. Furthermore many see their lived experience of impairment and disability as part of their identity and what makes them who they are as a person.

Adoption of the Social Model of Disability implies adopting identity first language e.g. ‘disabled person’ rather than ‘person with a disability’. However individuals remain free to make their own choices regarding how they wish to refer to themselves.

Collective terms and labels

The word 'disabled' is a description not a group of people. Use 'disabled people' not 'the disabled' as the collective term.

However, many Deaf people whose first language is BSL consider themselves part of 'the Deaf community' – they may describe themselves as 'Deaf', with a capital D, to emphasise their Deaf identity.

Avoid medical labels. They say little about people as individuals and tend to reinforce stereotypes of disabled people being 'patients' or unwell.

Don't automatically refer to 'disabled people' in all communications – many people who need disability benefits and services don't identify with this term. Consider using 'people with health conditions or impairments' if it seems more appropriate.

Positive not negative

Avoid phrases like 'suffers from' which suggest discomfort, constant pain and a sense of hopelessness.

Referring to disabled people as 'vulnerable' implies inherent weakness and helplessness. It can also result in making people more of a target for domestic violence, disability related harassment and hate crime.

Disabled people can find themselves in vulnerable situations, often due to lack of support and social isolation and it is this that should be tackled.

Wheelchair users may not view themselves as 'confined or bound to' a wheelchair – try thinking of it as a mobility aid instead.

Everyday phrases

Most disabled people are comfortable with the words used to describe daily living. People who use wheelchairs 'go for walks' and people with vision impairments may be very pleased – or not – 'to see you'. An impairment may just mean that some things are done in a different way.

Common phrases that may associate impairments with negative things should be avoided, for example 'deaf to our pleas', 'turn a blind eye' or 'crippled by debt'.

Words to use and avoid

🙄 Negative terms		😊 More positive terms
The handicapped	Handicapable	Disabled people
The disabled	Differently-abled	
Cripples	Invalids	
People with disabilities	People with special needs	
Normal People	Able bodied people	Non-Disabled people
Learning disabilities	Retarded	People with learning difficulties
The Mental	Mentally disabled	Person with a mental health condition
A spastic	Scopey	A person with Cerebral palsy
A Mongol	Mong	A person with Down's Syndrome
The Deaf	Hard of Hearing	Deaf person
The blind		A person with a visual impairment / blind person
The dumb		A person with a speech impairment
Midget	Dwarf	Little Person
A victim of...	Afflicted by...	A person with (the particular medical condition)
Stricken by...	Suffers from...	
Wheelchair bound	Confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user
Siamese twins		Conjoined twins
An Epileptic...	A Diabetic...	A person with Epilepsy, Dyslexia, Diabetes...
A Dyslexic...		
Special Needs		Access Requirements

Avoid passive, victim words. Use language that respects disabled people as active individuals with control over their own lives.* The term 'people with a learning disability' is in widespread use including among self-advocacy groups. From a Social Model perspective equating disability with impairment is problematic therefore those who advocate identity first language may refer to 'people with learning difficulties' or 'people with cognitive or intellectual impairments'.

Imagery

Disabled people comprise 25% of the Welsh population and in presenting Wales as an inclusive nation, use images that reflect its diverse communities, challenge stereotypes and help break down barriers.

Images selected should represent disabled people as active citizens, exercising choice and control including interacting with non-disabled people in the workplace, school or social setting.

Avoid stock images such as a person in a wheelchair looking forlorn and helpless. These reinforce negative stereotypes about how life must be for disabled people. Not all impairments are obvious, however clichés such as ‘helping hands’ or a person being pushed in a wheelchair should be avoided.

Unless an article is about technological aids don't use an image of a hearing aid, wheelchair or other object to represent disabled people.

Some tips on behaviour

- use a normal tone of voice, don't patronise or talk down
- don't be too precious or too politically correct – being super-sensitive to the right and wrong language and depictions will stop you doing anything
- never attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to
- address disabled people in the same way as you talk to everyone else
- speak directly to a disabled person, even if they have an interpreter or companion with them

Resources

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inclusive-communication/inclusive-language-words-to-use-and-avoid-when-writing-about-disability>

<http://disabilityinkidlit.com/2016/07/08/introduction-to-disability-terminology/>

<http://www.disabilitywales.org/projects/embolden/> - Reporting on Disability for Journalists Guide