

Disability Inclusion Language Guide

Language is a powerful tool for building inclusion. The language we use often reflects our unconscious biases and preconceived ideas about people. Inclusive language enables people with disabilities to feel valued, respected and part of a team or church community.

All Salvos have a responsibility to ensure that their language is not offensive, disrespectful, or excluding people with disabilities, but rather edifies and builds up the body of Christ. "The tongue has the power of life and death" (Prov 18:21), using language that encourages and gives life is essential to building communities of welcoming and belonging.

Content note: The following sections contain examples of offensive language.

How to use this guide?

This guide can be used to clarify how inclusive language is communicated with people with disabilities in any Salvation Army setting. Read, remember, and practice the inclusive language phrases. If in doubt, clarify with the person that the language you are using is appropriate.

Person-first Language vs Identity-first Language

Person-first language (people with disability) and identity-first language (disabled people) are both used in Australia. Throughout this guide we recommend using person-first language to avoid unnecessary focus on a person's impairment or difference in ability.

People with disability often have strong preferences for one term or the other, so it is best to follow the lead of the person or group you are talking about. It's okay to ask. If that isn't possible, use person-first language or refer to a person by their name.

Language Tips

- Focus on the person rather than the difference in their ability, keep an open mind and be willing to learn.
- Consider whether it is necessary to refer to the person's disability when describing them. If it is, place the person first before the description of the impairment, as this avoids unnecessary attention being placed on their disability. E.g., 'Jane is a successful writer who lives with cerebral palsy.'
- Avoid using terms that sensationalise disability either positively or negatively. These terms can be offensive and can draw unwanted and inaccurate attention to a person's impairment or disability. E.g., 'Bob is *suffering* from cerebral palsy.' 'Isn't it *amazing* how Kate uses her wheelchair to get around?'
- Be aware of colloquial terms that can be hurtful to people with disability. These words can reinforce negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. E.g., 'That test was *crazy* hard!' 'Jenny was *blindly* following your advice.'

Inclusive Language Alternatives

Language that excludes	Inclusive Language
They are disabled, handicapped, crippled, lame, defective...	Person with a disability, people with disabilities, or person has lived experience of disability.
They suffer from a disability	(Person's name) is diagnosed with (name of health condition).
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound...	(Person's name) uses a wheelchair or mobility device.
Disabled people	People with disabilities, people of all abilities.
The blind, person without sight...	(Person's name) is blind, has a vision impairment, is low vision.
The deaf, hearing impaired...	(Person's name) is deaf, hard of hearing, living with hearing loss.
Crazy, insane, mad, manic, mental, mentally ill, mentally unstable, loony, nuts, psycho, psychopath...	(Person's name) has a psychosocial disability/ a mental health condition
Disabled/Handicap parking or bathroom	Accessible parking or accessible bathroom
Able-bodied, Healthy, Normal person	Person living without a disability,
Mute/dumb	(Person's name) is non-verbal.
Dwarf/midget	(Person's name) is of short stature.
Retarded, spastic, moron, special, simple, defective...	Person with a cognitive disability or person with an intellectual disability.
Downy/Mongol	Person with Down syndrome.
Aspy/Aspie/Autistic	Person with autism or Autistic person.
High/Low functioning autism	Person on the autism spectrum.
Brain-damaged	Person with a brain injury.
Hyper/Hyperactive	Person with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)

External Resource

A helpful external resource for further guidance on language and disability written by people with disability is the People with Disability Australia, [PWDA Language Guide](#).

Further Guidance

To discuss this language guide or seek advice on opportunities to be more inclusive of people with disabilities, please contact the national Disability Inclusion Lead, disabilityinclusion@salvationarmy.org.au