

## Speaking With People with Disabilities

When you speak to a person with a disability, remember that he or she is a person first who also happens to have a disability. If you need information about the disability, don't hesitate to ask the person about it directly.

Ask if assistance is needed rather than assuming it is. Then follow the instructions of the individual to avoid possible injury to the person or yourself.

Maintain eye contact and talk to the person even if he or she is using an interpreter.

When speaking with a person who has a speech impairment or uses an augmentative communication system, be patient and give the person time to respond to your question. Don't try to finish a sentence for the person. If you don't understand what the individual has said, say so and ask him or her to repeat the statement or say it another way.

Use a normal tone of voice. Speaking loudly can cause pain for some people. Do not lean on a person's wheelchair or distract a working animal. Don't "play" with assistive equipment.

Don't hesitate to use everyday expressions. It's fine to say "see you later" to a person who is visually impaired or "let's take a walk" to a person using a wheelchair.

## Use Positive Images and Graphics

When creating printed communications, watch out for stereotypes in graphics and pictures. A cartoon of a person who is visually impaired being directed to the wrong door by a sighted person promotes negative attitudes. A picture of a person seated in a wheelchair at a computer console emphasizes ability. Use positive images and graphics to portray individuals with disabilities.

# Choosing Words With Dignity



New Hampshire  
COUNCIL ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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## Choose Words With Dignity

All people want to be accepted in their communities as equals with other New Hampshire citizens.

What you write and what you say can enhance the dignity of people with disabilities and can promote positive attitudes about their abilities.

Let your descriptive words emphasize a person's worth and abilities, not the challenges he or she experiences. Refer to the person first rather than the disability. The phrase "people with disabilities" is preferred, for instance, over "the disabled."

This pamphlet presents suggestions for language preferred by Granite Staters with disabilities. Not only is equality everyone's civil right, using appropriate language is common courtesy.

## Don't Use Negative Terms

### NO

● The handicapped; the disabled



● The blind



● Suffers a hearing impairment



● Afflicted by MS



● CP victim



● Retarded: mentally defective



● Confined to a wheelchair; wheelchair bound



● Normal person (implies person with a disability is not normal)



● Dumb; mute



● Courageous (implies the person is a hero or martyr because of their disability)



## Use Affirmative Phrases

### YES

● People with disabilities

● Person who is blind; person who is visually impaired

● Person who is deaf; person who is hard of hearing

● Person who has multiple sclerosis

● Person with cerebral palsy

● Person with an intellectual disability

● Person who uses a wheelchair

● Person without disabilities; non-disabled person

● Unable to speak; person who is non-verbal

● Successful; productive

There is NO appropriate alternative for these:

cripple **X** lame **X** vegetable **X** them