Disability Terminology

Almost everyone will experience impairment and/or disability as individuals or in relationships with friends and family. You should always ask questions directly to the person with the disability if you are unsure about anything. Speak and act in the same manner as you would for anyone else. Do not correct a person with a disability when the person or people are referring to themselves.

Begin thinking of the word **typical** rather than "normal"!

GREEN LIGHT WORDS: ALMOST ALWAYS APPROPRIATE
- Disability= Minority group identity category and coalitional term
- Impairment = Refers to the "diagnosis" or "functional limitation"
- Person-First Language= Attempt to emphasize the humanity of people who have impairments. Examples: People with Disabilities or Person with Cerebral Palsy
- Disability Community
- Wheelchair user
- Apparent= general public can spot the impairment readily
- Non-Apparent= general public might not be able to spot impairment readily or it would take time to recognize the person's difference as an impairment

YELLOW LIGHT WORDS: USE WITH CAUTION
- Disabled person= Preferred by activists (Identity-First Language)
- Nondisabled= Centers disability, but some people won't know what you mean. Preferred by activists and academics
- Handicapped in describing an entrance/parking spot/bathroom/etc. (while this is outdated terminology, sometimes people may not recognize references to an "accessible" entrance/parking spot/bathroom/etc.)

RED LIGHT TERMINOLOGY
- "The Disabled"= objectifies people, lumping them all together
- Crazy= Historically, used to demean and negatively refer to someone with a mental health disability. Rarely used in a positive light
- Insane or Mad (as in Mad Hatter)= Same reason as Crazy
- Wheelchair-bound, bed bound, and "confined to a wheelchair"
- Victim of . . .Suffering From. . .Afflicted with .
- Using a disability as an adjective or metaphor= Diminishes the experience of people with the disability, minimizing or mischaracterizing its impact
  - Examples: "I'm so OCD about this stuff." "I have a schizophrenic style" "He's a total psycho" "what are you deaf?" "He is blind to the needs of his community" "I'm so ADD, I just can't focus!" "He is a such a sociopath"
- Using antiquated disability related terms to call someone or something stupid
  - Examples: Lame, Gimp, Spaz, Retarded
- Invalid, Crippled
- Handicapped in describing a person (outdated terminology)

THESE PATRONIZING TERMS ANNOY MANY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES
- Special, Handicapable, Challenged, Special needs

ALTERNATIVES

PROBLEMATIC TERM(S)	MEANING	ALTERNATIVES
The Disabled, The Handicapped	People with disabilities	People with disabilities
Handicapped entrance/parking spot/bathroom	Accessible to people with disabilities	Accessible entrance/parking spot/bathroom
Wheelchair-bound and "confined to a wheelchair"	uses a wheelchair	Uses a wheelchair, wheelchair user, person with a mobility impairment
Victim of . . .Suffering From. . . Afflicted with	Has a disability/impairment	Person with … , person with a diagnosis of…
Mental Retardation	Intellectual disability	Intellectual Disability (this is the formal replacement), Cognitive Disability
The deaf/Deaf person	People/Person who are/is deaf	People who are deaf/ Person who is Deaf
The mentally ill	Has a psychiatric disability	Person with a psychiatric disabilities
Midget or Dwarf	Little person, person of short stature	Little People/Person of short stature
Epileptic	Has epilepsy	Person who has epilepsy
"lame" "spaz"or "retarded"	bad	Awful, Uncool, Frustrating, Pointless, Annoying, Irritating, Obnoxious, or Gross
"crazy" "mad" or "insane"	intense	Awesome, Amazing, Incredible, Frantic, Frenzied, or Wild
"crazy" "mad" or "insane"	unreasonable or absurd	Baseless, Ridiculous, Unreasonable, Absurd, Messed Up, or Unacceptable
"crazy" or "insanely"	as an intensifier (as in "crazy good")	Wicked, Amazingly, Ridiculously, Intensely, Astoundingly, or Overwhelmingly
"crazy" "psycho" or "insane" or "a sociopath"	a bad, dangerous character	Dangerous, Menacing, Threatening, Scheming, Murderous, Treacherous, or Deceitful