

# Disability Inclusion: Communications and language guide

This document should be used in with [Article 8](#) of the Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The way disability is communicated should promote and support the human rights of people with disabilities. This document serves as a quick guide to inclusive communications and language through a lens of the human rights based approach. The approach, enshrined in the *Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)*, recognises that the experience of disability occurs when the way society is organised is unaccommodating to an individual's needs and this creates barriers that prevent their participation. By reducing or removing these barriers, the experience of disability can be reduced.

For example, it's not that a child with a vision impairment is incapable of learning, but rather that the school isn't accessible; it lacks Braille resources, the teachers have negative attitudes, and the government has no education policy for children with disabilities – all of these barriers are what keeps that child from achieving an education, not their impairment. The human rights based approach looks at ways of removing and reducing barriers that prevent people with disabilities from full participation in society.

## 1. Avoid negative language and stereotypes

Negative language promotes stereotypes, prejudices and harmful practices relating to people with disabilities. It is important to promote positive perceptions and greater social awareness about the capacity and capabilities of people with disabilities to help dismantle barriers created by negative attitudes.

- Avoid language that provokes pity, such as 'suffers from', 'helpless', 'hopeless' or their world is/was 'dark', 'silent' or 'colourless'
- Avoid terms that group people or settings in a way that objectifies, such as 'women of Africa', 'impoverished village' or 'Africa's starving children'
- Always give context and explain the bigger picture – remember it's the interaction with the environment that creates the experience of disability, not the impairment

## 2. Avoid messages of 'curing' or 'treating' people with disabilities

Impairments or disabilities cannot be 'cured' or 'treated', but we can raise awareness about what the barriers are and develop strategies to remove or reduce barriers in order to promote inclusive societies for all.

- Do not use the word ‘cure’ in any circumstance – it has very negative connotations and is not aligned with a rights based approach
- Do not use ‘treat’ in relation to any permanent disabilities or impairments, including psychosocial disabilities (mental health issues)
- Using ‘treat’ in relation to a temporary or treatable medical condition, such as cataracts or clubfoot is okay

### 3. Always keep the person first

In line with the CRPD, always put the person first, not their impairment.

- Never define someone by their disability.
- Do not put the disability first; always put the person front and centre. For example, don’t say: “the hearing impaired child, Sally, wants to go to school”; say: “Sally is hard of hearing and wants to go to school”
- Do not refer to someone as their disability. For example, don’t say: “Sally is a schizophrenic”; say: “Sally has schizophrenia”

### 4. Promote the capabilities and contributions of people with disabilities

Always recognise and promote the skills, merits and abilities of people with disabilities and the contributions they make to their families, communities and wider society.

- Always emphasise the active involvement, self-initiative and capabilities of people with disabilities in shaping their own future
- Do not portray dependence or take away someone’s agency\* (\*the capacity of an individual to act independently and to make their own free choices)
- Never perpetuate the image or message of westerners as ‘rescuers’ or ‘saviours’

Do use	Don’t use
People with disabilities / Person with a disability	Disabled person, the disabled, handicapped, PWD, abnormal
People without disabilities / Person without a disability	Normal person, everyone else
People with psychosocial disabilities or people with mental health issues / Person with a psychosocial disability or person with a mental health issue	Mental, mad, crazy, insane, a mental illness, a mental disorder,
People with intellectual disabilities or people with learning disabilities / Person with an intellectual disability or person with a learning disability	Mental handicap, mental impairment, slow, learning impairment
People who are blind or people who have a vision impairment / Person who is blind or person who has a vision impairment	The blind, visually impaired, visionally impaired, suffers from vision loss, someone who’s world is dark/black/colourless
Deaf people or people who are hard of hearing Deaf person or person who is hard of hearing a Deaf person (use capital D when the person/s uses sign language to communicate or if they identify with the Deaf community)	Hearing impaired, hearing impairment, deaf-mute, deaf- suffers from hearing loss, someone whose world is silent

People with epilepsy / Person with epilepsy	Epileptic
People with physical disabilities / Person with a physical disability	Crippled, lame
People who use wheelchairs or wheelchair-users Person who uses a wheelchair or wheelchair-user	Confined or restricted to a wheelchair, wheelchair bound
Unable to speak / uses synthetic speech	Mute, dumb