

## Talking About and Interacting with the Disabled Community

Resource informed by the [National Center for Independent Living](#)

*At Notre Dame, we understand that our words carry weight. The language we use, regardless of our intention, can make others feel marginalized and violated, or included and understood. We are committed to diversity, accessibility, and community. These values are made manifest when we extend kindness and dignity to students and colleagues with disabilities, both visible and invisible.*

*Like many marginalized identity groups, the disabled community consistently strives to model language that is inclusive, affirming, and welcoming. While this language is born of the social model of disability—which emphasizes person-first, intentional phrasing—members of the Notre Dame community should be cognizant of how individual community members prefer to be talked about. In the same way that there is no monolithic ‘disabled community,’ there is no monolithic language preference. Please enter into spaces with deference & an open mind.*

*That being said, please know that there are some words and phrases that are considered offensive. A non-exhaustive guide on best practice in interaction and alternative language can be found below.*

### Best Practices

- **DO** ask questions directly of and speak directly to the person with a disability, not someone you perceive as their caregiver.
- **DO** ask before touching someone’s wheelchair, walker, or mobility equipment.
- **DO** assume independence and honor preference. Ask if the person could use help, but then respectfully honor if they indicate that they can move, navigate, etc. by themselves.
- **DO** listen and trust individuals to know their own limitations. Do not doubt any expressed need for accommodations.
- **DON’T** assume someone has requested accommodations or has a disability based on their physical presentation.
- **DON’T** force someone to accept accommodations, even if they’ve requested them. For example, if someone would prefer to sit in general admission seating despite having initially requested accessible seating, do what you can to accommodate.

<b>Don't Use</b>	<b>Do Use</b>
Wheelchair-bound Confined to a wheelchair	Wheelchair user
Midget Dwarf	Little person
Mute Dumb Hearing impaired	Deaf Hard-of-Hearing
Visually impaired Blind	Blind (in reference to complete loss of sight) Legally blind (in reference to almost complete loss of sight) Low vision
Handicapped Differently abled Handicapable Special	Disabled Person Person with a Disability
Handicap parking Handicap restroom	Accessible parking Accessible restroom
Suffers from Crippled by	Has ____ (condition / disability)
Retard / Retarded	Person with an intellectual disability
Brain Damaged	Person with a brain injury
Able-bodied Normal	Non-Disabled Person / Person without a Disability
Advantages Benefits Special Needs	Reasonable Accommodations Support Functional Needs