



*Language can empower individuals and their families or reinforce limiting stereotypes.*

information provided by  
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## Media Tips

### The power of language

An individual's quality of life is dependent on their ability to fully participate in community life.

Words, and the way we communicate, profoundly influence acceptance and participation. Language can empower individuals or can reinforce unhelpful stereotypes.

*Communication to the public should be based on respect.*

To ensure your communication with and about people with a disability is positive and inclusive please take a moment to check that your copy is in line currently accepted terminology associated with the diagnosis..

Please use...

- A baby with Down syndrome
- She has Down syndrome
- A person who has Down syndrome
- Down syndrome is an intellectual disability
- A condition or genetic condition

### Common inappropriate language

- A Down's baby/person/child
- A Downsie or Down's
- Suffers from or is a victim of Down syndrome
- Retarded or mentally handicapped
- Disease/illness/handicap or 'the disabled'

### In summary

Avoid using variations which place the disability before the person, this places the focus on the person and not the disability

Using person first language helps your audience remember they are reading or hearing about a person who has feelings, needs and rights.

*“Disability is not something you are it's something you have”*

This slight but powerful language shift helps us view people with disabilities as capable and deserving of respect.

Please also refer to the 'About Down Syndrome' section of our website which dispels some of the myths about Down syndrome.



*Down syndrome is a genetic condition. It is not an illness or a disease.*

#### **Down Syndrome Guild Offers:**

- personal support and information to families in the KC metro area including connecting families, community groups around the metro
- professional development and in-service trainings relating to Down syndrome for hospitals, schools and families
- Inclusion support to assist students with Down syndrome and their teachers and peers in mainstream schools
- resource library of current and accurate information available through a lending library and E-newsletter
- website and social media (Facebook, twitter, Instagram)
- For media enquiries, please contact Down Syndrome Guild's Executive Director

## **Reporting Guidelines**

As professional communicators, educators, and human service providers, you are in a unique position to shape the public image of people with Down syndrome. The words and images you use can create either a straightforward, positive view of people with Down syndrome or an insensitive portrayal that reinforces common myths and is a form of discrimination.

The correct terminology to use is "*a person with Down syndrome.*" You should refrain from saying a Down's person or she has Downs as this is inappropriate. Down's syndrome is inappropriate as well as the founder of the condition, John Langdon Down, did not himself have Down syndrome.

**DO NOT FOCUS ON DISABILITY** unless it is crucial to a story. Focus instead on issues that affect the quality of life for those same individuals, such as accessible transportation, housing, affordable health care, employment opportunities, and discrimination.

**DO NOT PORTRAY SUCCESSFUL PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME AS SUPERHUMAN OR HEROES.** Even though the public may admire super achievers, portraying people with Down syndrome as superstars raises false expectations that all people with Down syndrome should achieve this level.

**DO NOT SENSATIONALIZE DOWN SYNDROME** by saying afflicted with, crippled with, suffers from, victim of, and so on. Instead, say a person who has Down syndrome.

**PUT PEOPLE FIRST**, not their disability. Say woman with Down syndrome, children who have Down syndrome or people with Down syndrome. This puts the focus on the individual, not the particular functional limitation. Because of editorial pressures to be succinct, we know it may be difficult but ask you to be sensitive to using people first language.

**EMPHASIZE ABILITIES**, not limitations. For example: uses a wheelchair/braces, walks with crutches, rather than confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound, differently-abled, birth difference, or crippled. Similarly, do not use emotional descriptors such as unfortunate, pitiful, and so forth.

**SHOW PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME AS ACTIVE** participants of society. Portraying persons with Down syndrome interacting with nondisabled people in social and work environments helps break down barriers and open lines of communications.