

People First Language

A Short Guide for Friends,
Advocates & Classrooms



SPECIALMIRACLES





What is People First Language?

Definition:

People First Language (PFL) puts the person before the diagnosis. It recognizes that someone has a condition, but is not defined by it.

Example:

Instead of saying "A Down syndrome child," say:

"A child with Down syndrome."

This small change centers the person's humanity before their diagnosis.

Why It Matters:

- Words shape how we think and treat people.
- Labels can limit, but names and identities empower.
- People First Language shows respect, dignity, and inclusion.

Imagine This:

Would you want to be described as "a glasses person" instead of "a person who wears glasses?" That's why words matter!

SAY THIS

- 1 A person with Down syndrome
- 2 A child who uses a wheelchair
- 3 A student with a disability
- 4 A person with autism
- 5 He has a diagnosis
- 6 She receives special education services
- 7 A person with an intellectual disability
- 8 They use a communication device

NOT THIS

- 1 A Down syndrome kid
- 2 A wheelchair-bound child
- 3 A disabled student
- 4 An autistic person (**unless self-chosen**)
- 5 He is mentally handicapped
- 6 She is special ed
- 7 A retard (**never acceptable**)
- 8 They can't talk

Everyday Respect

Putting People First in Real Life

- **Start with Names.**

Say “This is my friend Alex. He has Down syndrome,” not “This is a Down syndrome kid named Alex.”

- **Talk About Abilities, Not Limits.**

Focus on what someone can do. For example, “She loves art and tells amazing stories with pictures.”

- **Model It for Others.**

Correct gently if a peer uses outdated language. For example. “Actually, it’s better to say ‘a person with...’—that way we put them first.”

- **Teach Inclusion Early.**

Use PFL in the classroom, home, and community spaces.

- **Spread the Word.**

Be an advocate! Help others learn why this matters.

Remember:

“Words are powerful. Let’s use them to build up, not break down.”