

# **Disabled People's Association's**

## **Dictionary of Disability Terminology**

First Edition

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Extract from *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* by Jonathan Glover published by Jonathan Cape. Used by kind permission of The Random House Group Limited.

Set in 16/17pt Plantin, a standard large-print size and font selected to make the contents accessible to many people with low vision.

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# Foreword

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*“It is in the context of a particular culture and language that our created identity is validated by the recognition bestowed by others. So any lack of respect for our culture and language in turn devalues our personal self-respect. In recent times, awareness of the centrality of this has increasingly shaped the way people show respect for the dignity of others. The desire not to use disparaging terms for other groups can have its comic side, and is often dismissed as a product of ‘political correctness’. But the concern behind it is part of the growth of one of our central moral resources.”* - **Jonathan Glover, Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century**

These wise words seem to sum up our aims with this slender book. Words are critical in shaping ideas, perceptions and attitudes. They can be used to reinforce existing prejudices or to liberate people from stereotypes, prejudices and misconceptions.

If anyone doubts the value of our mission

or the potential for relatively rapid change, consider the distaste with which we all now view the word “nigger”. None of us would dream of using it. Yet only a generation or two ago it was an internationally acceptable and widely used term for the individual people of an entire ethnic group in the USA; not just in use orally, it also appeared in book titles. Closer to home, and more recently, the Australian word “abo” to describe an aboriginal or indigenous person is considered offensive by most people and is dropping out of use. The moral? Language changes, and we are capable of giving it a nudge in the right direction - even if we run the risk of being considered “politically correct” by some people or sometimes require a few extra words to make our communication.

In the context of disability, negative and patronising language produces, predictably, negative and patronising images and attitudes. Words in popular use mirror attitudes in society and by changing the words we can begin to change those attitudes. Those attitudes are often the most difficult barriers that

people with disabilities face. Positive attitudes can be shaped through careful, thoughtful presentation of information about people with disabilities.

It is very important for us all to choose and use the right words, whether we are individuals talking privately or whether we are people like newspaper sub-editors in a position to influence attitudes in society. By making a conscious effort to use words that do not have negative undertones or bias, we can help to break down barriers.

General guidelines can be applied. People with disabilities prefer you to describe the person, not the disability (“someone with dyslexia” rather than “a dyslexic”); it is polite to refer to an individual’s disability only if it is relevant; avoid images that, unwittingly or consciously, evoke pity or guilt (“wheelchair-bound” is one such popular yet misleading term, since a wheelchair is generally seen as liberating or enabling by its user or rider).

It is not only our words that impact the lives of people with disabilities. There is

a growing awareness of the subtleties of acceptable social etiquette and interaction between disabled and non-disabled people.

For example, if you wish to assist a blind person, first make the offer then allow him or her to hold your elbow as you lead the way. As a courtesy when meeting a blind person, mention where you are and who is with you.

Note also that service animals, of which guide dogs are the best-known examples, are not pets and should not be touched, fed or spoken to without the user's permission.

When speaking with someone who is hard of hearing or deaf, speak clearly without raising your voice and allow them to see your lip movements to enable them to lip-read (but remember that not all people who are hard of hearing or deaf are able to lip-read).

If a disabled person is accompanied by a caregiver, do not be tempted to communicate with the disabled person

through the caregiver (unless it is clearly indicated that this is appropriate); address the disabled person directly.

Children should be taught not to laugh, stare or point at people with disabilities, nor should they pat disabled people on the head or make other patronising gestures. Parents should refrain from telling their children how lucky they are compared with the disabled person. If it is relevant, a clear, simple and brief explanation of the disability to young people may help them understand.

Guidelines should be followed regarding people in wheelchairs. First, ask how you can help. Talk to a person in a wheelchair at eye level with them. Do inform the person in the wheelchair of your intention, e.g. when tilting the wheelchair. Make sure the seat belt (if any) is fastened before moving off. Apply the brakes when the wheelchair is stationary, when transferring and when leaving the wheelchair unattended. Ask the person in the wheelchair if they are comfortable, especially if they have transferred. Always maintain at least one wheelchair length

behind another wheelchair rider. Ask for assistance if you cannot overcome an obstacle. Look ahead to avoid sudden changes in level and other hazards. Look out for drain gratings and approach in a diagonal manner. If possible, push the wheelchair on the pavement rather than on the road.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people within the Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) of the Republic of Singapore, who shared our vision for this project and generously funded the publication of this first edition. My thanks go also to the editor, David Blocksidge, whose efforts helped to realise my vision for this book.

It is my fervent hope that everyone who has occasion to refer to this book sees the value in it and can apply its principles in their lives. This is a living book; your considered opinions, suggestions and inputs are always welcome in this and in subsequent editions.

**Ron Chandran-Dudley, July 2003**



# Editor's Preface

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The definitions here are, as in all dictionaries, subjective opinions. However, in forming them we spoke to many people and consulted many sources (too numerous for mention here), to all of whom I extend my gratitude.

In my capacity on this occasion as a lexicographer, I am indebted to the long line of lexicographers stretching back into antiquity, all of whom made my work easier. Thanks to their earlier scholarly efforts, I had at my fingertips a stack half a metre high of dictionaries - English language, medical and others - plus an invaluable thesaurus and a number of other reference books. In addition, I browsed websites in several countries, notably the United Kingdom, United States of America and Singapore. Through such sources, some one million words became available to me, so it can be seen that my final shortlist for inclusion in this book has to be somewhat arbitrary!

I borrowed a phrase here and adapted a few words there, all the while keeping in mind our aim: to change the way people use words when they are speaking or writing about disabilities and people with them. What was so striking about this process was that to the best of our knowledge no existing work (printed or electronic) adequately, accurately or comprehensively covers the ground we have attempted to cover. Indeed, nothing comes close. Many medical terms, for example, remain frustratingly unacceptable and even downright offensive to people with disabilities. And many words used by the worldwide community of disabled people, their caregivers and their advocates remain undefined in conventional dictionaries, at least in the way disabled people would understand them or like to use them.

There were several criteria for inclusion of a given word or term. The main ones were that the word needed challenging in its existing usage (“affliction” or “birth defect”); that it had not been adequately or publicly defined elsewhere

(“equalisation of opportunities”); that it was an offensive word for which alternatives are clearly needed (“wheelchair-bound”); or that it is a common word with a new or extended meaning (“access” or “advocate”).

Everyone involved in this project truly believes that this is new territory, which was precisely why the Disabled People’s Association felt the need to produce such a dictionary. If the definitions written and the entries selected stir up diverse opinions, that will probably be a good thing because it means people will be thinking about the words they choose to use. And thought is the beginning of change.

There are doubtless words and phrases we have inadvertently omitted in this dictionary; please feel free to get in touch (email: [dpaadmin@dpa.org.sg](mailto:dpaadmin@dpa.org.sg)) with your suggestions for terms for inclusion in future editions or your comments on the definitions. In such a difficult area, it is best for everyone concerned to remain open-minded.

Language grows and changes, and no dictionary can hope to be totally comprehensive and one hundred percent correct. There are some two million words in the English language alone, and new words are being introduced faster than old ones drop out of use. It is my hope, however, that the *Dictionary of Disability Terminology* serves to establish good general guidelines in a largely neglected area of language.

I should be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank the President of the Disabled People's Association, Ron Chandran-Dudley, for kindly asking me to become involved in such a challenging and worthwhile project, and for gently guiding me on many occasions. This project has been an education for me, too. Finally, please note that nothing in this book is intended to provide specific personal medical advice or take the place of such advice. For this, one should always consult appropriate medical professionals.

**David Blocksidge, July 2003**

# Acknowledgements

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This project has been a fine team effort. The editors wish especially to thank the following for their enthusiastic help and support:

The Ministry of Community Development and Sports (MCDS) of the Republic of Singapore, who shared our vision for this project and generously funded the publication of this first edition.

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The staff at Disabled People's Association for their administrative and liaison work behind the scenes, notably Ramaravikumar Ramakrishnan, Anusiah Tharmalingam and Regana R.

# A

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**ABLE-BODIED** *adjective* sometimes used incorrectly as an antonym of “disabled” in phrases such as “Disabled people, unlike able-bodied people...”. The preferred antonym for “disabled” is “non-disabled”.

**ABNORMALITY** *noun* Although this term is used by the medical profession to describe “a malformation, deformity or anomaly”, it is best avoided in any general discussion of disability since to use “abnormality” is stigmatising; people with disabilities do not consider themselves “abnormal” or to have “abnormalities”. *adjective abnormal.* (See also **normal.**)

**ACCEPTANCE** *noun* process by which non-disabled people include people with disabilities in their activities, conversation, etc. (See also **inclusion, participation** and **equalisation**; compare **non-acceptance.**)

**ACCESS** *noun* suitability of a building or other structure for use by people with disabilities. In a broader sense, access also includes making forms and information accessible to people with visual or cognitive disabilities; making alarms and signals accessible to people who are deaf or hard of hearing; and making services such as education and transport accessible to people with disabilities. *adjective* **accessible**. (Compare **barrier**; see also **digital divide**.)

**ACCESS AISLE** *noun* an accessible pedestrian space between elements, such as parking spaces, seating and desks, that provides clearances appropriate for use of the elements.

**ACCESS AUDIT** *noun* detailed examination of a building or other structure, generally by independent experts, to ascertain its suitability for use by people with disabilities. (See also **access**.)

**ACCESSIBILITY** *noun* the degree to which a building or other structure provides access for (mainly physically) disabled people. In Singapore this is determined primarily by regulation 36(2) of the Building Control Regulations.

**ACCESSIBLE ROUTE** *noun* a continuous unobstructed path connecting all accessible elements and spaces of a building or facility. Interior accessible routes may include corridors, floors, ramps, elevators, lifts, and clear floor space at fixtures. Exterior accessible routes may include parking access aisles, curb ramps, crosswalks at vehicular ways, walks, ramps and lifts.

**ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING** *noun* in the context of rehabilitation and independent living by disabled people, these include dressing, making the bed, showering, shaving, combing hair, eating, making drinks and all other activities which will assist in enabling a person with a disability to function to the maximum of his or her capacity within



the family and the community.

**ADAPTABILITY** *noun* the ability of certain building spaces and elements, such as kitchen counters, sinks and grab bars, to be added or altered so as to accommodate the needs of individuals with or without disabilities or to accommodate the needs of persons with different types or degrees of disability.

**ADVOCACY** *noun* the act of speaking or interceding for and on behalf of people with disabilities. Advocacy activities seek to empower and allocate resources to people in need of them.

**ADVOCATE** *noun and verb* someone, who may or may not themselves be disabled, who speaks or intercedes for people with disabilities; to speak or intercede in such a way.

**AFFLICTION** *noun* general term for a disability. Unacceptable because it is degrading and stigmatising; a disability is not an affliction. By extension, phrases

such as “afflicted with...” are also unacceptable. Use instead the specific name of the disability. Instead of “afflicted with...” use “has...”.

**ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE** *noun* progressive degenerative disease of the brain that may involve a combination of symptoms including delirium, delusions, memory disturbance, depression and behavioural disturbances. Usually deteriorates to profound dementia over five to ten years. Alzheimer’s disease is one of two main types of dementia, the other being multi-infarct dementia. When speaking generally, it is acceptable to refer to a person with the disease as having a mental disability or simply to say “He/She has Alzheimer’s disease”. (See also **dementia**; **multi-infarct dementia**.)

**AMBULANT DISABLED PERSON** *noun* someone who is, either with or without personal assistance, and who may depend on prostheses (artificial limbs), orthoses (callipers), sticks,

crutches or walking aids, able to walk on the level or negotiate suitably graded steps provided that convenient handrails are available.

**AMPUTATION** *noun* removal of a limb or other appendage from the body.

**AMPUTEE** *noun* someone who has had one or more limbs amputated. Unless using the term in a medical context, it is preferable to rephrase a sentence such as “He/She is an amputee” along the lines of “He/She has a physical disability” on the principle that people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. For the same reason, the word amputee should not be used as a class noun in sentences such as “Amputees often require artificial limbs.” An acceptable way to convey the same meaning is: “People who have undergone amputation often require artificial limbs.”

**ARTHRITIS** *noun* inflammation of joints; the form of rheumatism confined to the joints. There are many types of

arthritis and the condition, which may be acute or chronic, ranges from mildly painful to severely disabling. **adjective arthritic**. It is considered unacceptable to use the word as a noun to describe someone as “arthritic” in a sentence such as “He/She is an arthritic.” People should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. An acceptable alternative is “He/She has arthritis.” However, using the plain adjective is often acceptable in a sentence such as “He/She is arthritic”. (Compare **rheumatism**.)

**ASPERGER’S SYNDROME** *noun* developmental disorder characterised by severe impairment of social interactions and restricted interest and behaviour. When speaking generally, it is acceptable to refer to a person with the condition as having a developmental disability, or say specifically “He/She has Asperger’s syndrome”.

**ASSISTIVE DEVICE** *noun* item of equipment made specifically to help overcome a disability through the

promotion of independence, in particular in the home or at work. Examples are teletypewriter, telephone amplifier, wooden block (to raise desk for a wheelchair user), Braille printer. (Compare **mobility aid**.)

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY** *noun* applied technology developed to assist people with disabilities. An example is voice screen-reading software for computers.

**ATAXIA** *noun* failure of muscle coordination or irregularity of muscle action.

**ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER** *noun* a syndrome, occurring mostly in boys, characterised by behavioural and learning problems.

**AUDITORY** *adjective* relating to the sense of hearing or organs involved in hearing.

**AURAL *adjective*** of, relating to, or received by the ear.

**AUTISM *noun*** developmental disorder typically appearing in the first three years of life, and characterised by severely reduced social interactions, language skills, cognitive function and self-help skills. ***adjective autistic***. Do not use “autistic” as a class noun as in phrases such as “The autistic are...” or as a noun in sentences such as “He/She is an autistic.” Use instead terms like “Autistic people” if saving space, for example when writing for a newspaper, or preferably “People with autism”, and when describing an individual, say simply “He/She has autism.” The principle is that people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. However, using the plain adjective is often acceptable in a sentence such as “He/She is autistic”.

# B

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**BARRIER** *noun* obstacle preventing a person with a disability from living independently, working, travelling and/or having access to buildings, services, forms and information. (See also **environmental barrier**; compare **access**.)

**BIRTH DEFECT** *noun* congenital condition. The term “birth defect”, although still used by some medical professionals, is unacceptable to people with disabilities because of the negative connotations of the word “defect”. Use instead a neutral term such as “congenital condition” or rephrase the sentence using words like “disabled since birth” or “born with...”. (See **congenital condition, defect**.)

**BLINDNESS** *noun* total inability to see. *adjective blind* totally unable to see. Do not use “blind” as a class noun as in phrases such as “The blind are...”. Use instead terms like “Blind people” if saving space, for example when writing

for a newspaper, or preferably “People who are blind” or “People who are visually handicapped”. The principle is that people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. (See also **glaucoma**, **low vision**, **visual impairment**; compare **sighted**.)

**BORN WITH** See discussion under **birth defect**.

**BRAILLE** *noun and verb* system of printing/writing for people who are blind in which the characters are series of raised dots; to print or transcribe in Braille characters.

**BRITTLE BONE** *noun* lay term for the condition of osteoporosis, which involves a reduction in bone mass and is most frequently diagnosed in postmenopausal women and elderly men. It often leads to disabling bone fractures.



# C

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**CAREGIVER** *noun* a person, generally a professional, a friend or a relative, who looks after someone with a disability. Also known as a **carer**.

**CEREBRAL PALSY** *noun* motor disorder generally characterised by spastic paralysis, mental disability, seizures and failure of muscular co-ordination. The degree of disability varies from having one or more conditions like extreme tightness or looseness of the muscles of the body, improper head, shoulder or hip control to slight speech impairment. Cerebral palsy is not curable. Its onset can occur before or during birth or due to illness or injury of the child early in life. If it is necessary to refer to a person with the condition, say specifically “He/She has cerebral palsy”. (See also **spastic paraplegia**; **spastic**.)

**CHALLENGED** *adjective* This word gained popularity during the 1980s in terms such as “physically challenged”,

which was intended to replace “physically handicapped” and similar terms unacceptable to some people with disabilities. However, the word has been used so widely by satirists (“vertically challenged” meaning short, for example) it has lost any useful serious meaning for most people with disabilities.

**CLEAR FLOOR SPACE** *noun* the minimum unobstructed floor or ground space required to accommodate a single, stationary wheelchair and occupant.

**COCHLEAR IMPLANT** *noun* medical device implanted within the ear to restore hearing.

**CONGENITAL CONDITION** *noun* condition present at birth. Examples are Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and cleft palate. (See also discussion under **birth defect**.)

**CONSULTATION** *noun* process whereby people with disabilities are consulted about their own lives, or about

decisions to be made affecting them.

**COUNSELLOR** *noun* person who provides counselling as a therapy. Special terms include vocational rehabilitation counsellor.

**CRIPPLE** *noun* a person with a mobility disability. The word “cripple” and derivatives such as crippled are offensive. Use instead specific terms in neutral, inoffensive language (“He/She has severe arthritis, which makes it difficult for her to walk.”) and avoid labelling the person primarily or solely by their disability. (See **lameness**, **limp**, **mobility disability**.)

**CROSS-DISABILITY** *noun* (of a charity, NGO or other body) existing to serve people of differing disabilities. e.g., cross-disability movement.

**CRUTCH** *noun* wood or metal item made to reach from the armpit or elbow to the ground as an aid to walking in the event of a broken leg or similar injury.

# D

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**DEAF AND DUMB** *adjective* this term to describe a person who is unable to hear and speak is not acceptable since the word “dumb” has negative connotations. Use instead a phrase such as “deaf and speech-disabled” or, if the hearing loss is partial, “hard of hearing and speech-disabled”. “Mute” is similarly unacceptable.

**DEAF-AND-DUMB LANGUAGE** *noun* term (no longer acceptable) for the system of manual signs for communication with and among people who are deaf or hard of hearing. “Signing” or “sign language” are good alternatives. (See **signing**.)

**DEAF-MUTE** *noun* a person who is unable to hear and speak. The term is offensive; use instead specific terms in neutral, inoffensive language to describe their condition, but avoid labelling the person primarily or solely by their disability. (See **deaf and dumb**.)

**DEAFNESS** *noun* total inability to hear. *adjective deaf*. Do not use “deaf” as a class noun as in phrases such as “The deaf are...”. Use instead terms like “Deaf people” if saving space, for example when writing for a newspaper, or preferably “People who are deaf”. The principle is that people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. Note too that the terms “deaf” and “deafness” should be used only of people having a total inability to hear; other terms such as “hard of hearing” cover partial loss of hearing. (See also **hard of hearing**; **hearing impairment**; compare **hearing**.)

**DEFECT** *noun* Although this term continues to be used by the medical profession, it is generally unacceptable to people with disabilities, for example in phrases such as “speech defect”, because it perpetuates negative associations. Use instead specific terms for their conditions in neutral, inoffensive language. *adjective defective*. (See also discussion under **birth defect**.)

**DEFORMITY** *noun* Although this term (like the one above) continues to be used by the medical profession, it is unacceptable to people with physical disabilities as a description of their conditions because it perpetuates negative associations. Use instead specific terms for the conditions in neutral, inoffensive language. *adjective deformed.*

**DEMENTIA** *noun* a general loss of cognitive abilities characterised by memory loss and one or more of several other symptoms including severe speaking difficulties, reduced organisational and planning abilities, and problems recognising the significance of sights, sounds and other sensory stimuli. The medical profession acknowledges many forms of dementia; examples are boxer's dementia, post-traumatic dementia, presenile and senile dementia, and vascular dementia. Two main types of dementia are Alzheimer's disease and multi-infarct dementia. It is important to note that dementia is an illness and not normal ageing. In referring to

someone with dementia, it is acceptable to say “A person with dementia” or “A person with a mental illness”, or name the specific dementia in question. Avoid the word “demented” as it has been widely used as a term of abuse. (See also **Alzheimer’s disease; multi-infarct dementia.**)

**DETECTABLE WARNING** *noun* a standardised surface feature built in or applied to walking surfaces or other elements to warn visually handicapped people of hazards on a circulation path.

**DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY** *noun* general term for a number of conditions involving mental and/or physical disabilities arising before the age of 18 years. Also called **developmental disorder**. Specific conditions in this category include autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and intellectual disability. *adjective* **developmentally disabled**.

## **DEVELOPMENTAL DISORDER**

**noun** See above.

**DIAGNOSIS** **noun** the determination of the nature of someone's disease or condition.

**DIGITAL DIVIDE** **noun** the gaps in access to information & communications technology (ICT) between individuals, groups, countries and areas. The digital divide affects disabled people more than any other group, since they face intrinsic problems of accessibility ranging from a fundamental lack of training in ICT, to physical barriers, the lack of assistive computer technology and inaccessible multimedia design. (See also **access**.)

**DISABILITY** **noun** a condition caused by an accident, trauma, genetics or disease that may limit a person's mobility, hearing, vision, speech or cognitive function. Incapacity recognised by law as limiting or preventing, for example, mobility (thus creating a right to use parking spaces reserved for disabled



people, for instance), the ability to drive (“legally blind” people may not drive), or to work (the US Federal Government defines disability for its purposes as “inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to last or has lasted for a continuous period of not less than 12 months”). The World Health Organisation defines disability as “any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner of or within the range considered normal for a human being”. The cross-disability, grassroots-based advocacy organisations Disabled Peoples’ International and Disabled People’s Association define disability as “the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment”.

**DISABLED *adjective*** Do not use “disabled” as a class noun as in phrases such as “The disabled are...”. Use instead terms like “Disabled people” if saving

space, for example when writing for a newspaper, or preferably “People who are disabled”. The principle is that people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. Its antonym is non-disabled and not able-bodied. (Compare **handicap**.)

**DISABLED SINCE BIRTH** See discussion under **birth defect**.

**DISCRIMINATE** *verb* the act making an unjust distinction against a person with a disability compared to the way a non-disabled person would be treated in the same circumstances.

**DISCRIMINATION** *noun* unjust distinction against a person with a disability compared to the way a non-disabled person would be treated in the same circumstances. Examples (drawn from recent case histories) are: a woman with one hand who was initially refused entrance to a university to study for a degree in nursing; a man who was refused admittance to a night club because of a

genetic disorder, epidermolysis bullosa, which gives him blisters on his hands, feet and neck; a disabled woman who was refused admittance to a swimming pool despite being accompanied by a caregiver. **adjective discriminatory.**

**Multiple discrimination** the unjust treatment of a person (relative to how others are treated in the same situation) because of more than one of these or other factors: their gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, age or religion.

**Positive discrimination** the practice of favouring people with disabilities and others perceived to be disadvantaged, especially in terms of resources and opportunities; also known as **reverse discrimination.**

**DIVERSITY** *noun* recognising and valuing differences between individuals and groups of people. (This is an important concept in terms of the integration of people with disabilities into society.)

**DOWN SYNDROME** *noun* a

congenital (and usually chromosomal) disorder characterised by a flattened facial profile, moderate to severe mental disability, and short stature. Also called **Down's syndrome**. Formerly called mongolism, a term which is no longer acceptable. Mongolism, mongol, mongoloid and related terms are offensive. When speaking generally, it is acceptable to refer to a person with the condition as having an intellectual disability, or simply say "He/She has Down syndrome".

**DUMBNESS** *noun* inability to speak. The term is not acceptable because of its negative connotations; use instead neutral, inoffensive words such as "speech disability". *adjective dumb*. (see also **deaf and dumb**, **deaf-mute**, **mute**, **mutism**.)

**DWARF** *noun (plural dwarves)* person who is unusually short. Some people with the medical condition of dwarfism find the word "dwarf" acceptable while others dislike it and

prefer the term “little person”; there is currently no consensus. (See also **little person**.)

**DWARFISM** *noun* medical term for any of several conditions characterised by underdevelopment of the body. (See also **infantilism**.)

**DYSARTHRIA** *noun* a speech disorder involving unclear articulation.

**DYSLEXIA** *noun* an organising or learning difficulty affecting language, fine co-ordination skills and working memory skills. It is independent of overall ability and conventional teaching. When untreated, there are significant limitations in the development of certain aspects of speech, reading, spelling, writing and sometimes numeracy - which may lead to secondary behavioural problems - although other areas of ability are unaffected. *adjective* **dyslexic**. Do not use “dyslexic” as a class noun as in phrases such as “Dyslexics are...” or as a noun in sentences such as “He/She is

a dyslexic.” Use instead terms like “Dyslexic people” if saving space, for example when writing for a newspaper, or preferably “People with dyslexia”, and when describing an individual, say simply “He/She has dyslexia.” The principle is that people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability.

# E

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**EARLY DETECTION** *noun*  
discovery or diagnosis of a disability in the womb, shortly after birth or through screening in school.

**EARLY INTERVENTION** *noun*  
treatment of a disability at an early stage in its progress.

**EGRESS, MEANS OF** *noun* a continuous and unobstructed way of exit travel from any point in a building or facility to a public way. A means of egress comprises vertical and horizontal travel and may include intervening room spaces, doorways, hallways, corridors, passageways, balconies, ramps, stairs, enclosures, lobbies, horizontal exits, courts and yards. An accessible means of egress is one that complies with guidelines for use by people with disabilities and does not include stairs, steps or escalators. Areas of rescue assistance or evacuation elevators may

be included as part of accessible means of egress.

**EMOTIONAL DISABILITY** *noun* mental illness. The terms “emotional disability”, “mental disability”, “mental illness” and “psychiatric disability” are acceptable whereas “emotional disorder”, “emotional disturbance” and “mental disorder” are considered to have negative associations, except in a medical context, and should be avoided. Terms such as “crazy” and “mad” are offensive and should not be used. *adjective* **emotionally disabled.** (See **mental disability** and **mental illness.**)

**EMOTIONAL DISORDER** *noun* See **emotional disability, mental disability** and **mental illness.**

**EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE** *noun* See **emotional disability, mental disability** and **mental illness.**

**EMPOWERMENT** *noun* process by which individuals or groups of people



gain the ability to make decisions and gain control over their lives, thereby transforming feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and hopelessness into positive feelings of mastery, control and hope. **verb empower**; **adjective empowered**. (Compare **advocacy**.)

**ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIER** **noun** obstacle preventing a person with a disability from travelling and/or having access to buildings. An example is a building with steps as the sole means of entry, which would prevent people in wheelchairs from visiting that building. (See also **barrier**; compare **access**.)

**EQUALISATION** **noun** the process whereby people with disabilities take their rightful place in society alongside non-disabled people, brought about through many means including legislation, promotion of barrier-free environments, community-based rehabilitation services, education and training and employment.

**EQUALISATION OF OPPORTUNITIES** *noun* (as defined in 1982 by the United Nations World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons) the process through which the various systems of society and the environment, such as services, activities, information and documentation, are made available to all, particularly to persons with disabilities.

**EXCLUSION** *noun* conscious or subconscious process by which people with disabilities are left out of activities such as conversation, social life, politics, community activities, work and leisure pursuits open to non-disabled people. *verb* **exclude**; *adjective* **exclusive**. (See also **non-acceptance**; compare **inclusion** and **non-participation**.)

# F

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**FUNCTIONAL DISABILITY** *noun*  
disability that precludes an acceptable level of participation in the activities of daily living. (See **activities of daily living**.)

# G

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**GAIT** *noun* manner of walking. This is both a general term and a medical term and has no negative connotations; thus it may be useful when alluding to walking or mobility disabilities.

**GLAUCOMA** *noun* disease in which the optic nerve is damaged, leading to problems with vision; glaucoma is a major cause of blindness worldwide.

**GRAB BAR** *noun* a bar used to give stabilising assistance to a person engaged in a particular function.

**GUIDE DOG** *noun* trained dog used by a blind person to help them have independence of mobility. (See **Seeing Eye dog**; **service animal**.)

# H

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**HANDICAP** *noun and verb* a physical or attitudinal constraint imposed upon a person, regardless of whether that person has a disability; to constrain in such a manner. An example is a wheelchair-rider who faces the handicaps of stairs, narrow doorways and kerbs. The World Health Organisation definition of a handicap is “a disadvantage, for a given individual, resulting from an impairment or a disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role that is normal (depending on age, sex and social and cultural factors) for that individual”. The advocacy organisations Disabled Peoples’ International and Disabled People’s Association define handicap as “the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical or social barriers”. Some medical professionals continue to use the word “handicap” virtually interchangeably with “disability”, a usage which is unacceptable to most disabled people.

**HANDICAPPED** *adjective* Do not say “handicapped people” if you mean “disabled people” or better still, “people with disabilities”. However, terms such as “visually handicapped people” are used as social descriptions.

**HANDRAIL** *noun* a rail used in circulation areas such as corridors, ramps, stairways and passages to assist in continuous movement.

**HARD OF HEARING** *adjective* describes a person with some hearing loss who is able to communicate through speaking, and who usually has listening and hearing abilities adequate for ordinary telephone communication; many people who are hard of hearing use a hearing-aid. (See also **deaf**, **hearing-impaired**; compare **hearing**.)

**HEALTHY** *adjective* Never use this word to contrast with disabled people in sentences like “Disabled people, unlike healthy people...”. Disabled people can be just as healthy as non-

disabled people. (See **non-disabled**.)

**HEARING** *adjective* having the ability to hear. Use “hearing people” as the antonym for “deaf people”, as in the sentence “Few hearing people can lip-read in the way that many deaf people are able to.” (See also **hard of hearing**; **hearing impairment**; compare **deaf**.)

**HEARING IMPAIRMENT** *noun* non-preferred, medical term for partial loss of hearing within a range from slight to severe. *adjective* **hearing-impaired**. (See **hard of hearing**; see also discussion under **impairment**; compare **deaf**.)

**HOUSEBOUND** *adjective* unable to leave one’s house due to illness or disability. However, the term is considered to have negative connotations and a neutral alternative such as “unable to leave the house” should be used.

**HUMPBACK** *noun* See below.

**HUNCHBACK** *noun* a hunched or

protuberant back. It may be preferable to use the medical term, kyphosis, when referring to this condition since hunchback has connotations of deformity and ugliness. When speaking generally, it is acceptable to refer to it simply as a physical disability. Also called **humpback**. Never refer to a person as “a hunchback”; people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. *adjective* **hunchbacked**. (See **kyphosis**.)

**HYPERACTIVITY** *noun* excessive increased muscular activity. Synonym for attention deficit disorder (ADD) or syndrome. (See **attention deficit disorder**.)



# I

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**IDIOCY** *noun* obsolete, offensive medical and psychological term for severe mental disability and lower intelligence quotient (IQ). Idiot, the medical term to describe the person with the disability, is equally obsolete and offensive except for the specific usage below. (See also **imbecility**.)

**IDIOT SAVANT** *noun* medical term for a person with severe mental disability and lower intelligence quotient (IQ), yet who has a particular faculty, such as music, memory or mathematics, developed to an exceptionally high degree.

**IMBECILITY** *noun* obsolete, offensive medical and psychological term for moderate mental disability. Imbecile, the medical term to describe the person with the disability, is equally obsolete and offensive. (See also **idiocy**.)

**IMPAIRMENT** *noun* injury, disability,

functional loss or weakened state. Due to its negative connotations, it is best to avoid this controversial word and its derivatives, although there is no agreement about the word even among disabled people and associations representing them, and it is still in widespread use among the medical profession. For example, the World Health Organisation defines impairment as “any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or functions”. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the transitive verb “impair” as “Make less effective or weaker; devalue; damage, injure.”

***adjective impaired.*** Uses include the terms hearing-impaired, speech-impaired and vision-impaired, all of which may be found in a medical context but are not accepted by many people with disabilities because they are perceived as devaluing.

**INCAPACITATED** *adjective* sometimes used euphemistically (and inaccurately) to mean “disabled”, this

word should be avoided. Use instead specific terms in neutral, inoffensive language.

**INCLUSION** *noun* the admittance of people with disabilities to activities such as conversation, social life, work and leisure pursuits open to non-disabled people. *verb include; adjective inclusive.* (See also **acceptance**; compare **exclusion** and **participation**.)

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION** *noun* the education of children with disabilities side-by-side with non-disabled children, rather than in segregated education institutions such as special schools. There is a growing preference for inclusive education. (Compare **special school**.)

**INDEPENDENT** *adjective* able to function without depending on another person. (See **activities of daily living**.)

**INFANTILISM** *noun* medical term for any of several conditions involving

persistence of the characteristics of childhood into adult life; intellectual disability is a feature, and some of the conditions also involve dwarfism. (See also **dwarfism**.)

**INFIRMITY** *noun* sometimes used euphemistically (and inaccurately) to mean “disability”, this word should be avoided. Use instead specific terms in neutral, inoffensive language. *adjective* **infirm**.

**INFLICTION** See above.

**INSTITUTION** *noun* a healthcare facility, often dedicated to the treatment of patients with psychiatric illness. Also known as **institute**.

**INTEGRATION** *noun* the inclusion, participation and acceptance of people with disabilities in society at large.

**INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY** *noun* general term for developmental disability or learning disability. A person

with intellectual disability has intellectual functioning significantly below average. In addition, he or she has limitations in adaptive behaviour which affects his or her self-help, living or social skills. Intellectual disability is not an illness but a condition occurring before, during or after birth but before 18 years of age. (See **mental illness**, **mental disability**.)

**INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT** *noun* a number arrived at by intelligence tests intended as a measure of intelligence. Usually abbreviated to IQ.

**INVALID** *noun* an infirm or sickly person. This term is sometimes used incorrectly to describe disabled people; illness can make invalids of non-disabled people and disabled people alike. (It does not help that terms such as “invalid car” continue to be used in some countries when alternatives are available.) Also sometimes used literally translated from French or Spanish, and still unacceptable. The preferred term to replace invalid is “a person with a disability”.

# K

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**KERB RAMP** *noun* a short ramp cutting through a kerb or built up to it.

**KYPHOSIS** *noun* medical term for greatly increased convex curvature of the spine; hunchback. It may be preferable to use the medical term when referring to this condition since hunchback has clear connotations, reinforced through films and other media, of deformity and ugliness. In general terms, “A person with a spinal disability” is an acceptable way to refer to someone with such a condition. *adjective* **kyphotic**. (See also **hunchback**.)

# L

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**LAMENESS** *noun* medical term considered by people with disabilities to have negative connotations; mobility disability or physical disability are better terms. *adjective* **lame**. (See also **cripple**, **limp**, **mobility disability**.)

**LANDAU-KLEFFNER SYNDROME** *noun* an epileptic syndrome of childhood characterised by partial or generalised seizures and other symptoms. Also called **acquired epileptic aphasia**.

**LANGUAGE IMPAIRMENT** *noun* although this term is often used to replace the common but offensive term “speech defect”, preferred terms are “speech disability” and “speech handicap”. *adjective* **language-impaired**. (See **speech disability**; see also discussion under **impairment**.)

**LEARNING DISABILITY** *noun* general term for any one of a group of conditions that includes, for example,

autism and dyslexia. ***adjective* learning-disabled.**

**LIMP *noun and verb*** gait that avoids weight-bearing on one leg; walking in such a manner. (See also **cripple, lameness, mobility disability.**)

**LIP-READING *noun*** the ability to understand someone's speech by observing their lip movements. Also known as **visual hearing**. Both terms are acceptable.

**LITTLE PERSON *noun*** person who is unusually short. Some people with the medical condition of dwarfism find the word "dwarf" acceptable while others prefer the term "little person"; there is currently no concensus. (See also **dwarf.**)

**LOW VISION *noun*** impairment of vision causing significant visual handicap, yet leaving significant usable residual vision. (See **glaucoma, visual impairment**; compare **sighted**; see also discussion under **impairment.**)



# M

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**MAIMED** *adjective* sometimes used euphemistically (and inaccurately) to mean “disabled”, this offensive word should be avoided as it is degrading and stigmatising. Use instead specific terms in neutral, inoffensive language.

**MENTAL DISABILITY** *noun* any illness of the mind, such as altered perceptions, memory, emotional balance, thought or behaviour. The cause may be genetic, congenital, or as a result of physical, psychological, chemical, environmental or social factors. The terms “emotional disability”, “mental disability”, “mental illness” and “psychiatric disability” are acceptable whereas “emotional disorder”, “mentally sick”, “emotional disturbance” and “mental disorder” are considered to have negative associations and should be avoided except in their medical context.  
*adjective* **mentally disabled.**

**MENTAL HANDICAP** *noun* term often used interchangeably but in the view of many disabled people erroneously to mean “mental illness”. (See **emotional disability**, **handicap** and **mental disability**.)

**MILD MENTAL RETARDATION** *noun* term used to describe people with IQ in the range of 50-70 with varying degrees of skills in communications, daily living skills and so forth. Many are physically indistinguishable from non-disabled people, although some show the features characteristic of certain conditions, e.g. Down syndrome.

**MOBILITY AID** *noun* item of equipment made specifically to help overcome a disability through the promotion of independence of mobility. Examples are crutches, walking frames and wheelchairs. (See also **assistive device**.)

**MOBILITY DISABILITY** *noun* preferred general term to replace limp

or lameness. If the specific disability (arthritis, for example) is known, it is probably easier to use that instead of the general term. ***adjective* mobility-disabled.** (See also **cripple, lameness, limp.**)

**MONGOL** *noun* See **Down syndrome.**

**MONGOLISM** *noun* See above.

**MOTOR NEURON DISEASE** *noun* progressive disease involving loss of muscle mass and increasing paralysis. When speaking generally, it is acceptable to refer to a person with the condition as having a physical disability, or say simply “He/She has motor neuron disease”.

**MULTI-INFARCT DEMENTIA** *noun* one of the two main types of dementia (the other being Alzheimer’s disease). Multi-infarct dementia results from a series of strokes in the brain. (See also **Alzheimer’s disease; dementia.**)

**MULTIPLE DISABILITY** *noun* (of a person) having two or more disabilities, for example being both blind and deaf simultaneously. The term “multiply handicapped” may be used to describe such a person.

**MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS (MS)** *noun* progressive disease of the nerve fibres in the brain and spinal cord; symptoms include weakness, incoordination, emotional instability, and problems with speech, walking and vision. MS often affects young adults. When speaking generally, it is acceptable to refer to a person with the condition as having a mental and physical disability, or say simply “He/She has multiple sclerosis”.

**MUSCULAR DYSTROPHY** *noun* hereditary, progressive disease of the muscle system involving weakness and loss of skeletal muscles. When speaking generally, it is acceptable to refer to a person with the condition as having a physical disability, or say simply “He/She has muscular dystrophy”.

**MUTE** *noun* a person who is unable to speak due to a speech disability. The term, which is still in use among the medical profession, is offensive; use instead specific terms in neutral, inoffensive language to describe their condition, but avoid labelling any person primarily or solely by their disability. (See **deaf and dumb**, **deaf-mute**.)

**MUTISM** *noun* medical term for the condition of being unable to speak.

**MULTIPLE DISCRIMINATION** *noun* See **discrimination**.

# N

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**NON-ACCEPTANCE** *noun* resistance or reluctance on the part of non-disabled people to include people with disabilities in their activities, conversation and so forth. (See also **exclusion**; compare **acceptance** and **non-participation**.)

**NON-DISABLED** *adjective* preferred antonym for disabled.

**NON-HANDICAPPING** *adjective* imposing no physical or attitudinal constraint upon a person, as for example a “non-handicapping environment”.

**NON-IMPAIRED** *adjective* This term is best avoided except in a medical context. (See discussion under **impairment**.)

**NON-PARTICIPATION** *noun* choice by disabled person (based on their own assessment of their abilities or limitations) not to take part in activities such as conversation, social life, politics,

community activities, work and leisure pursuits with non-disabled people. (Compare **non-acceptance**, **exclusion** and **participation**.)

**NON-VISUALLY DISABLED**  
*adjective* acceptable antonym for blind or visually disabled or visually handicapped. (Compare **blind**; see also **sighted**.)

**NON-VISUALLY HANDICAPPED**  
**See above**

**NORMAL** *adjective* This word is offensive when used in a context comparing “disabled people” with “normal people” since it implies that disabled people are abnormal. The antonym for disabled is non-disabled.

# O

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**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY** *noun*  
therapeutic use of activities designed to improve quality of life and independence for the participant.

**ORTHOSIS** *noun (plural orthoses)*  
an appliance or apparatus used to support or improve the functioning of movable parts of the body. Orthotics is the specialty concerned with supplying and fitting such appliances.



# P

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**PARALYMPIC GAMES** *noun* the world's major event for athletes with disabilities, in particular spinal cord injuries. The games were begun at the National Wheelchair Sports Centre in Stoke Mandeville, U.K., home of the British Wheelchair Sports Foundation.

**PARALYSIS** *noun* condition involving loss of sensation or of muscle function. *adjective paralytic*. It is considered unacceptable to describe someone as "paralytic" in a sentence such as "He/She is a paralytic" since people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. Acceptable alternatives are "He/She is paralysed" or less specifically "He/She has a physical disability". However, using the plain adjective is often acceptable in a sentence such as "He/She is paralytic". (See also **paraplegia** and **quadriplegia**.)

**PARAPLEGIA** *noun* paralysis of the lower limbs. *adjective paraplegic*. As

with paralytic (above), it is considered unacceptable to describe someone as “paraplegic” in a sentence such as “He/She is a paraplegic” since people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. Acceptable alternatives are “He/She is paralysed from the waist down” (assuming you know the extent of the paralysis) or simply “He/She has paraplegia” or less specifically “He/She has a physical disability”. However, using the plain adjective is often acceptable in a sentence such as “He/She is paraplegic”. (See also **paralysis** and **quadriplegia**.)

**PARKINSON’S DISEASE** *noun*  
progressive neurological disorder involving tremor, shuffling gait, stooped posture, emotional instability in some cases, and other symptoms. When speaking generally, it is acceptable to refer to a person with the condition as having a physical (and, if applicable, mental) disability, or say simply “He/She has Parkinson’s disease”.

**PARTICIPATION** *noun* choice by disabled person (based on their own assessment of their abilities or limitations) to take part in activities such as conversation, social life, politics, community activities, work and leisure pursuits with non-disabled people. An early use of the word “participation” in this context occurred in the phrase “Full Participation and Equality” which was a slogan adopted during the United Nations-declared International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981. The phrase has become something of a rallying call in the years since; it was extended and used for example to mark the International Day of Disabled Persons (December 3) for 2001. (Compare **acceptance**, **inclusion** and **non-participation**.)

**PATIENT** *noun* Disabled people in general are not “patients” in their everyday lives, any more than non-disabled people are. Patients are clients of doctors or people undergoing treatment in hospitals.

**PERSON** *noun* This word is acceptable in many different contexts and avoids possibly offensive terminology. Examples include: “A person who has [name of disability]”; “A person who is paralysed” (replacing “A paralytic”); “A person with extensive brain injury” (replacing “A vegetable”) and so forth. The plural should be people rather than persons, as for example in the phrase “People with disabilities...”.

**PHYSICAL DISABILITY** *noun* Preferred general term that covers a wide range of conditions including arthritis, muscular dystrophy and paralysis.

**PHYSIOTHERAPY** *noun* physical treatment (as distinct from drug or other treatment).

**POLIO** *noun* Common abbreviation for poliomyelitis, an acute, infectious, viral disease that sometimes results in paralysis.

**POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION**  
*noun* See phrases under  
**discrimination.**

**PROSTHESIS** *noun (plural prostheses)* an artificial substitute for a body part; the term extends beyond limbs to include hearing aids, implanted pacemakers and so forth. Note that “Artificial leg” is preferable to “False leg” and similar terms. Prosthetics is the specialty concerned with supplying and fitting such appliances.

## Q

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**QUADRIPLEGIA** *noun* paralysis of the four limbs and part of the trunk. *adjective quadriplegic*. It is considered unacceptable to describe someone as “quadriplegic” in a sentence such as “He/She is a quadriplegic” since people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. An acceptable alternative is simply “He/She has quadriplegia” or less specifically “He/She has a physical disability”. However, using the plain adjective is often acceptable in a sentence such as “He/She is quadriplegic”. Also known as **tetraplegia**. (See also **paralysis** and **paraplegia**.)

# R

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**RAMP** *noun* a walking surface which has a running slope greater than 1:20 (i.e., rising one metre in every 20 metres of length).

**REHABILITATION** *noun* planned process with defined goals, timeframes and means in which professions and/or services co-operate in assisting the efforts of the client to achieve best possible functioning and coping capabilities, thereby promoting independence and participation in society.

**RESPIRE** *noun* a period of time taken by a caregiver away from the recipient of their care, in order that the caregiver can rest or take part in other activities that help sustain them and avoid caregiver burn-out.

**RETARDED** *adjective* Most people regard this word as offensive. Acceptable alternatives include

“intellectually disabled” or “intellectually handicapped”. The noun “retard” is equally offensive.

**RETT SYNDROME** *noun* progressive developmental disorder of the brain occurring exclusively in females, characterised by autistic behaviour, ataxia, dementia, seizures and other symptoms. Also called **cerebroatrophic hyperammonemia**.

**REVERSE DISCRIMINATION** *noun* See phrases under **discrimination**.

**RHEUMATISM** *noun* inflammation and degeneration of joints and related structures such as muscles. There are many types of rheumatism and the condition, which may be acute or chronic, ranges from mildly painful to severely disabling. **adjective rheumatic**. It is considered unacceptable to describe someone as “rheumatic” in a sentence such as “He/She is a rheumatic.” An acceptable



alternative is “He/She has rheumatism.” However, using the plain adjective is often acceptable in a sentence such as “He/She is rheumatic”. (Compare **arthritis.**)

# S

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**SCHIZOPHRENIA** *noun* any of a group of mental illnesses marked by major distortions of reality, withdrawal from social contact, and disturbances of thought, language, perception and emotional response. *adjective* **schizophrenic**. Do not use “schizophrenic” as a class noun as in phrases such as “Schizophrenics are...” or as a noun in sentences such as “He/She is a schizophrenic”. Use instead terms like “People with schizophrenia” and when describing an individual, say simply “He/She has schizophrenia”. The principle is that people should not be defined primarily or solely by their illness/disability. However, using the plain adjective is often acceptable in a sentence such as “He/She is schizophrenic”.

**SEEING EYE DOG** *noun* guide dog (US proprietary name). (See **guide dog**; **service animal**.)

## **SELF-HELP ORGANISATION**

**noun** an organisation run by a group of people, including people with disabilities, to promote their own interests and benefits and to help empower others with similar disabilities or situations to promote common interests and to achieve similar declared objectives.

## **SELF-RELIANT** *adjective*

economically self-sufficient, self-confident and independent. (See also **independent**.)

## **SENSORILY DISABLED** *adjective*

describes collectively those people who are visually handicapped, deaf or hard of hearing or who have some other disability due to the loss of a sense.

## **SERVICE ANIMAL** *noun*

any animal trained to provide assistance or perform tasks for the benefit of a person with a physical or mental disability. Guide dogs are the best-known examples of service animal or companion dog. These latter terms are used extensively in North

America and Europe but less so in Asia-Pacific and other regions of the world. (See **guide dog**, **Seeing Eye dog**.)

**SIGHTED** *adjective* preferred antonym for blind or visually disabled or visually handicapped. Example: "Visually disabled or visually handicapped people, unlike sighted people...". Other acceptable antonyms are non-visually disabled or non-visually handicapped. (Compare **blind**; see also **non-visually disabled** and **non-visually handicapped**.)

**SIGNING** *noun* the system of manual signs for communication with and among people who are deaf or hard of hearing and deaf-blind people. *verb* **sign**. (See **deaf-and-dumb language**.)

**SIGN LANGUAGE** *noun* See above.

**SOCIAL WORKER** *noun* trained person who provides professional assistance of various kinds to families or individuals in need because of poverty,

handicap, disablement etc., as well as being an advocate and/or agent of change from negative attitudes against his or her clients to positive ones; sometimes influences agencies and national social and health service policies.

**SPASTIC *adjective*** medical term describing spasms or sudden involuntary movements. Note that the word should not be used as a noun to label a person as it is offensive.

**SPASTIC PARAPLEGIA *noun*** condition, mainly hereditary, characterised by spasticity (spasms) of the paralysed part of the body. When speaking generally, it is acceptable to refer to a person with the condition as having a physical disability, or say simply “He/She has spastic paraplegia”. (See above; see also **cerebral palsy**.)

**SPECIAL NEEDS *noun*** term used to refer to the specific needs of people with developmental and similar disabilities and people with lower-than-average levels

of intellectual functioning. Special needs also addresses approaches adopted in teaching and training.

**SPECIAL SCHOOL** *noun* school catering for children with special needs, generally sensorily, physically and/or mentally disabled children. (Compare **inclusive education**.)

**SPEECH DELAY** *noun* inability to produce normal or age-appropriate speech due to a disability, such as mild hearing loss, that may be corrected. A speech delay is not necessarily classified as a speech disorder.

**SPEECH DISABILITY** *noun* general term for any condition materially affecting the action or faculty of speaking. (See **stammering**.)

**SPEECH DISORDER** *noun* problem with language-processing due to cerebral palsy, a tumour or another condition or disability.

**SPEECH IMPAIRMENT** *noun* speech disability. *adjective speech-impaired*. (See above; see also discussion under **impairment**.)

**SPINA BIFIDA** *noun* developmental physical disability involving the spine.

**STAMMERING** *noun* speech disability in which the speaker frequently repeats words or parts of words, a condition sometimes exacerbated by the reaction of impatient listeners. Also known as **stuttering**. (See **speech disability**.)

**STIGMATISE** *verb* pass an adverse value judgement on a person who differs from us, or attach an adverse judgement on oneself because of a perceived deficiency. *noun stigma* perceived deficiency due to actual physical differences, character blemishes or prejudice. Note that people with disabilities are especially likely to be stigmatised and/or stereotyped; eradicating this will require changing the attitudes from negative to positive of

society at large, of medical professionals, and of individuals, whether disabled or non-disabled.

**STUTTERING** *noun* See **stammering**.

**SUFFER** *verb* Do not use this word to refer to a person with a disability in a sentence such as “He/She suffers from Down syndrome”. Most disabled people do not think of themselves as “suffering” from their disability.



# T

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**TACTILE** *adjective* describes an object that can be perceived using the sense of touch.

**TETRAPLEGIA** *noun* See **quadriplegia**.

**TEXTTELEPHONE** *noun* machinery or equipment that employs interactive graphic (i.e., typed) communications through the transmission of coded signals across the standard telephone network. Text telephones can include, for example, devices known as TDDs (telecommunication display devices or telecommunication devices for deaf persons) or computers.

**THERAPIST** *noun* someone skilled in the treatment of disease or disability, especially in a particular area. Examples include speech therapist and physiotherapist.

**THERAPY** *noun* any treatment of a disease or condition.

**TOURETTE'S SYNDROME** *noun* a syndrome involving motor and vocal tics. People with Tourette's are sometimes prone to stigmatisation by society due to their compulsive utterance of vulgarities on occasion. Sometimes known as **Gilles de la Tourette's syndrome** or **disease**.

# V

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**VICTIM** *noun* It is inappropriate to refer to people with disabilities as “victims”, as in “He/She is a polio victim”. People with disabilities do not like to be perceived as victims for the rest of their lives, long after any possible victimisation may have occurred.

**VISUAL DISABILITY** *noun* See **visual impairment**.

**VISUAL HANDICAP** *noun* See **visual impairment**.

**VISUAL HEARING** *noun* the ability to understand someone’s speech by observing their lip movements. Also known as **lip-reading**. Both terms are acceptable. (See **lip-reading**.)

**VISUAL IMPAIRMENT** *noun* medical term for the condition of having low vision. Visual handicap is an acceptable (social) term to avoid the negative connotations of “impairment”.

***adjective* visually impaired.** (See **glaucoma, low vision, visually handicapped**; compare **sighted**; see also discussion under **impairment**.)

**VISUALLY HANDICAPPED**  
***adjective*** describes a person with low vision and can also refer to a blind person. However, do not use “visually handicapped” as a class noun as in phrases such as “The VH or the visually handicapped are...”. Use instead terms like “Visually handicapped people” if saving space, for example when writing for a newspaper, or preferably “People who are visually handicapped”. The principle is that people should not be defined primarily or solely by their disability. However, it has relevance in phrases such as “Visually handicapped dancer”. (See also **glaucoma, low vision, visual impairment**; compare **sighted**.)

# W

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**WHEELCHAIR** *noun* mobility aid used by people with physical disabilities that make walking difficult or impossible. Avoid phrases such as “Confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair-bound”, since wheelchair users (also sometimes known as wheelchair riders) view their wheelchairs as liberating or enabling rather than confining. The word “wheelchair” or its derivatives occurs in terms such as “wheelchair dancer” to describe a performing artiste and “marathon wheeler” or “wheelchair marathoner” to describe a marathon participant.

**WHITE CANE** *noun* white walking-stick carried by a blind person to locate obstacles in their path. It is occasionally referred to as a white stick.

**WILLIAMS SYNDROME** *noun* genetic disorder characterised by mild mental retardation, distinctive facial appearance, problems with calcium

balance and blood vessel disease. Also known as **Williams-Beuren syndrome**.