

**The Grassroots Committee of Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) created this pamphlet. SABE is a national self-advocacy organization created to ensure:**

- 1) people with disabilities are treated as equals to people without disabilities;
- 2) people with disabilities are given the same choices, rights, responsibilities and chances to speak up to empower themselves as people without disabilities;
- 3) people with disabilities have opportunities to make new friends; and
- 4) people with disabilities learn from their mistakes.

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## **SABE Grassroots Committee**

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# People First Language

*the basics*



**Each person has a name.**

**Please call me by my name.**

**My name is not a label or a diagnosis.**

**My name is Bernie.**

*- a self-advocate from New Jersey*

# People First Language

## What is it?

People First language is a respectful way of speech.  
People First language puts the person before the disability.  
People First language uses words all people understand.

## Why use it?

Words are hurtful when used incorrectly. As society's language changes, perceptions and attitudes will change — increasing acceptance and respect for people with disabilities. Using People First language is a huge step in the right direction to stop hurting others.

## How to help!

You may use this pamphlet in many ways. Distribute it to new members so they can learn more about People First Language. Offer it to social service agencies in your local area so they can decide where they stand on using People First Language. Ask elected officials to review it so they can make changes in legislation and policies. Share it with family and friends so they can better understand what is hurtful and what is respectful.



**Some states have changed their legislation to include people first language and other states are working in this direction. It took people with disabilities and advocates to step up to the plate and get changes made.**

**Missouri:** legislators considered a bill to remove "mental retardation" from the state DD agency's name but didn't pass it

**New York:** Governor Spitzer signed the Person First Bill in August 2007 to institute people first language for new and revised state laws, documents, etc.

**New Hampshire:** Governor John Lynch signed Senate Bill 153 into law to establish a commission to study changing statutory references to "mental retardation" and findings will be reported by November 1, 2007

**Oregon:** state law effective January 1, 2006

**Pennsylvania:** Executive Order signed July 22, 1992

**South Dakota:** lawmakers considered a bill early in 2007 to establish the use of People First language in state laws but didn't pass it

**Vermont:** the DD Act of 1996 required a state department name change from Division of Developmental Services to Division of Disability Aging Services

**Washington:** state law effective June 10, 2004

**Washington, DC:** passed 2 bills in 2006, the 1st to make sure past language changes and the 2<sup>nd</sup> to make sure present and future language will be People First Language

**Utah:** joint resolution made during 2006 General Session urging state agencies to update references to archaic language (mental retardation)

**This is the most up-to-date information at time of print.  
Contact SABE if you have additional information or to  
learn how to get involved in your state.**

# Legislation Addressing Language & Labels

**Alabama:** pending respectful language bill (HB246) in 2007 legislative session

**Alaska:** state law (HB357) effective May 12, 2006 revising existing state statute to remove outdated terms and replace with respectful language

**Arkansas:** passed People First Language bill in 2007 legislative session

**Connecticut:** passed respectful language bill (SB63) requiring the use of respectful language in Connecticut General Statutes when referring to persons with disabilities—October 1, 2007 name of Connecticut's Department of Mental Retardation officially changes to "Department of Developmental Services (DDS)" With a new name, the department is also changing its logo and is requesting stakeholders to submit ideas for the new design.

**Indiana:** pending bill (SB94) Governor Mitch Daniels signed Senate Bill 94 into law May 2 to

**Louisiana:** policy in Department of Hospitals and Health to use respectful language; seeking an executive order to expand this to other departments

**Massachusetts:** legislators are considering House Bill 1876 to change the name of the Department of Mental Retardation to the Department of Developmental Services

**Minnesota:** people first language law effective August 1, 2005

**Mississippi:** state law effective July 1, 2005 directing state agencies and drafting offices to prepare legislation and rules using respectful language

# To Say or Not To Say

## Hurtful Language

## Respectful Language

He is retarded. He is a slow learner.

He is a person with intellectual disabilities or cognitive disabilities or a leaning disability.

He is deaf. She is blind.

He is a person with deafness. She is a person with blindness.

They are handicapped or disabled.

They are people with disabilities.

She is autistic.

My daughter is a person with autism.

She is a Downs kid or a mongoloid.

She is a person with Downs Syndrome.

She has a birth defect

She is a person with a congenital disability.

He's wheelchair Bound

He uses a wheelchair.

He is a quadriplegic or paraplegic.

He is a person with quadriplegia or paraplegia.

He's a Dwarf or Midget

He is a person of short stature.

Handicapped rooms or parking

Accessible rooms or accessible parking

He is an epileptic.

He is a person with a seizure disorder or epilepsy.

She's a mute.

She is a person who does not speak.

She is crazy or a lunatic or a maniac.

She is a person with a mental health disability.

She is normal.

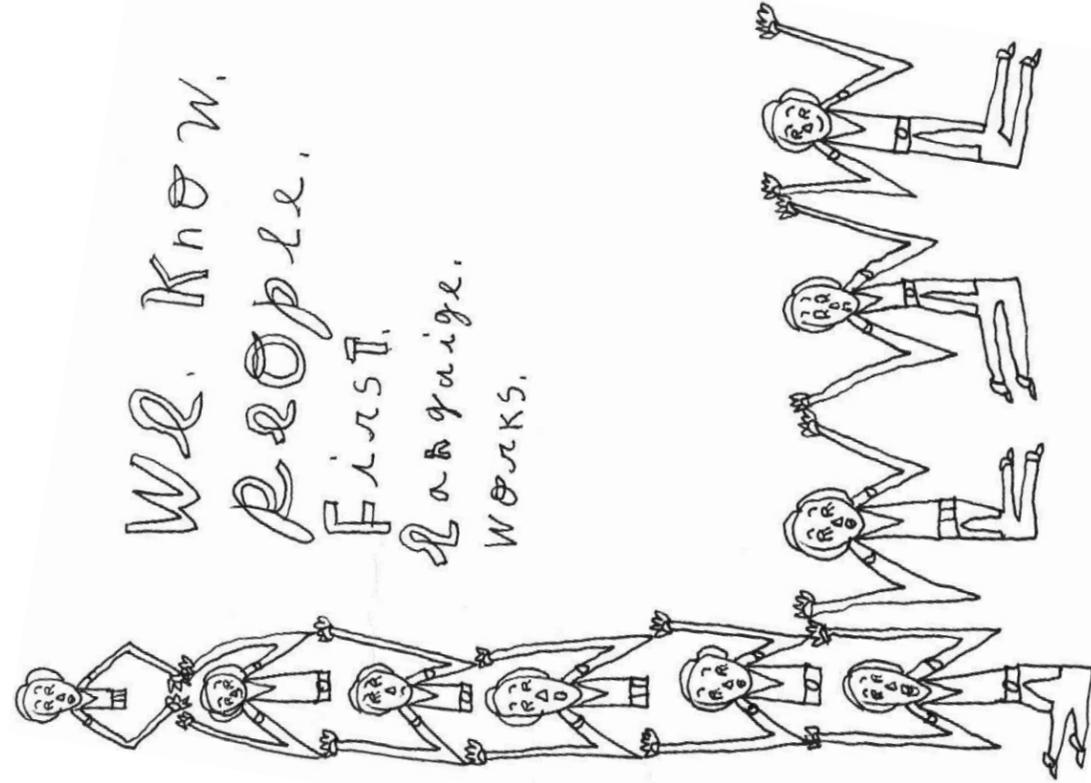
Use typical instead of normal.

She suffers from or is afflicted with or is a victim of..

She is a person with...

## WHAT does PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE mean to YOU?

People First language makes me feel alive, respected and free! **Julie Petty** • People who use People First language and come into my home respect my home and treat me as a person. **Bernie King** • PF language means to me humanity, respect and equality with all people in life. **Tracy Southard** • When people without disabilities use People First Language they are seeing people with disabilities as people first and as people who are part of their community. **Bernard Baker** • People First language means that people clearly see people with disabilities as people to respect. **Nancy Ward** • People First Language is not only a matter of respect between human beings but also a matter of triumph for people with disabilities. **Jeff Ridgeway** • People First Language is a matter of equality and respect for all people with disabilities. **Victor Robinson** • People First language is a matter of respect for people with disabilities. **Betty Williams** • People First Language means that persons with disabilities are referred to in respectful terms and expressions that are dignified and referred to by legislators with pride and respect. No more degrading, hurtful 'R' words! **Chad Sinanian** • That people first language means that the words that are written are easy to understand for all people. **Tia Nelis** • It means full citizenship, it means finally being thought of as any other citizen of the United States. **Karen Topper** • People First Language means Respect; treat people with dignity; it shows that you are a person before your disability; language matters; how you use it can lift a person up or tear them down. **Bryon Murray** • People First language reminds us that a person is not his hair color, her IQ, his ability to walk. We are each the sum of all our qualities, characteristics, values, knowledge and beliefs. We are each unique. **Barbara Bishop** • People First Language means that my name is Brad Linnenkamp. **Brad Linnenkamp** • We have the right to speak our minds and not take any guff from anyone. **Gayle Gardner** • It means respect. It means being referred to as everyone wants to be referred to not as a characteristic of that person. **Vicki Turnage** • People First Language eliminates sweeping statements, speculation and stereotypes by focusing on the person first rather than the disability. It avoids cute little sayings and promotes understanding, respect, dignity and positive outlooks. **Marsha Honore'-Jones** • I believe that all people like to be respected and not hurt by people calling them hurtful names such as idiot, retarded, etc. This language educates the people in the community and shows respect to all. **Ben Berroel** • It is about the value that we put on all people. We either put the person first or not. **Lecell Lane** • We honor and respect what we value; value the person first. **Michael Rogers** • People First Language means looking at the person first not the disability. Doing what I want to do, and not what someone tells me what I can or cannot do. **Monica Cooper**



SELF  
ADVOCATES  
BECOMING  
EMPOWERED