

## WHAT'S IN A WORD

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Frances Strong, who is a wheelchair user, is a spokeswoman for the rights and dignity of people with disabilities. She believes that some words can create barriers which are more often more handicapping than the actual disability itself. We reprint below some of the words she defines as giving negative images together with her suggested alternatives. These words are extracted from an article in the Canadian publication Rehabilitation Digest.

\* CRIPPLE, CRIPPLED - The image conveyed is of a twisted, deformed, unattractive, useless body. The effect is strong stigmatization and total, all-encompassing inferiority.

Instead say disabled, disability. Person with a disability is better than disabled person because it puts the person first and the disability second.

\* PATIENT - Being disabled is not the same as being ill. Omit the word patient except in reference to doctor or hospital situations, or when someone is actually ill.

\* VICTIM - People do not like to be perceived as victims for the rest of their lives, long after the victimization has occurred. Instead, say a person who has had a spinal cord injury, polio, a stroke, etc.

\* RETARDED - This word has become stigmatizing and is



offensive to people who bear the label. Instead say person who has a mental disability.

\* DEAF AND DUMB - is as bad as it sounds. Inability to hear or speak does not indicate less intelligence. Instead, say hearing disability or impairment, unable to speak, partial or total hearing loss.

\* RESTRICTED TO, CONFINED TO A WHEELCHAIR, CRUTCHES - Most people who use a wheel-chair, other mobility device, do not regard them as confining. Instead, they are viewed as liberating, as a means of getting around. Instead, say uses a wheel-chair or crutches, walks with crutches.

\* HEALTHY- When used to contrast with disabled, healthy implies the person with a disability is unhealthy. Many disabled people have excellent health. Instead say able-bodied, able to walk, see, hear, etc, people who are not disabled.

\* NORMAL- When used as the opposite of disabled, implies the disabled person is abnormal. This is very demeaning. Instead say people who aren't disabled, etc.

\* AFFLICTED WITH, SUFFERING FROM - Most people with disabilities don't view themselves as afflicted or suffering all the time. Instead, say a person who has (name the disability).



What do readers think about these words? Do you have words you don't like to be used? Let us hear your views so that we can share them.

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