



LANGUAGE MATTERS

ABLEISM EDITION

The language we use shapes our thinking, and has the power to either positively or negatively impact our community members. To be better allies and advocates, it is essential to align our language with our inclusive beliefs. Read more about some common yet harmful ableist language below, and see some ideas for how you can start shifting your own language today.

Instead of:	Try:	Because:
crazy, insane	wild, eccentric, fascinating, off the wall, bananas, nuts, unreal	these terms contribute to stigma surrounding mental health conditions. Why We Should Phase Out the Word "Crazy"
blindsided, blind to the fact, blind spot	surprised, caught off guard, took me by surprise, understanding gap, bias	these terms imply a lack of awareness in blind and visually impaired communities Ableist Language To Avoid - "Blind" Edition
Special Education	inclusion, inclusive services, student support services, student success services	these terms create exclusivity and imply that a specific group's needs are special compared to others The Problem With Calling It 'Special' Education
special needs	disability, neurodivergence	these terms imply that a specific group of people's needs are special, while in reality they are human needs Why We Say 'Disability,' Not 'Special Needs'
spaz	silly, goofy, awkward, erratic, chaotic, unpredictable	this term short for 'spastic' and contributes to stigma surrounding mobility differences Ableist Language To Avoid - "Spaz" Edition

Instead of:	Try:	Because:
tone deaf, falling on deaf ears	out of touch, not listening, talking to a wall	these terms imply a lack of awareness in d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities Ableist Language To Avoid – “Deaf” Edition
lame, gimp/gimpy	boring, disappointing, inadequate	these terms contribute to stigma surrounding mobility differences as they were historically used in this context Let's Stop Using the Word "Lame"
OCD (in a non-diagnostic sense)	meticulous, focused, tidy, organized	using a mental health diagnosis as an adjective is hurtful and implies the diagnosis is not significant OCD is not an adjective or a quirk, so let's all stop using it as one.
ADHD (in a non-diagnostic sense)	focused, locked in, engaged, distracted, disorganized, unpredictable	using a mental health diagnosis as an adjective is hurtful and implies the diagnosis is not significant ADHD: A Diagnosis not an Adjective
Autistic (as an insult)	replacing the term with what you mean specifically	using a mental health diagnosis as an adjective is hurtful and implies the diagnosis is not significant ‘Autistic’ Is Not An Insult
dumb	confused, unaware	this term was historically used to describe individuals deemed unintelligent Ableist Language To Avoid – “Dumb” Edition
cripple	disabled, injured, can't move	this term contributes to stigma surrounding mobility differences Ableist Language To Avoid – “Cripple” Edition
psycho, psychotic	erratic, dangerous, unpredictable	this term contributes to stigma surrounding mental health conditions, particularly that they are dangerous The Power of Words: Why Misusing 'Psycho' is Disrespectful and Harmful

Instead of:	Try:	Because:
r*tarded	replacing the term with what you mean specifically	this term is a slur for intellectually disabled individuals Why the R-Word Is the R-Slur
handicapped	disabled	this term is outdated and does not adhere to the social model of disability Ableist Language To Avoid – “Handicap” Edition
differently abled	disabled	using this term discounts society as the disabling factor Ableist Language To Avoid – “Differently-Abled” Edition
handicapable	disabled	using this term discounts society as the disabling factor Ableist Language To Avoid – “Handicapable” Edition
handicapped/disabled restrooms/parking	accessible restrooms/parking	these terms describe the person rather than the space They're not called Disabled Toilets anymore
wheelchair-bound	wheelchair user	this term implies that mobility aids are confining to the users Please Stop Saying “Wheelchair Bound”
suffering from	Living with, or identity-first language (depending on person's individual preference)	this term perpetuates the medical model of disability, and negates disabled joy ‘Disabled’: Just #SayTheWord

For more information, visit:

[Why You Need to Stop Using These Words and Phrases](#)
[The Harmful Ableist Language You Unknowingly Use](#)
[WGU Labs Inclusive Language Guide](#)

What would you add? Send us a message at arcelia@seniainternational.org!