

Language & Disability

by The Accessible Guide



www.theaccessibleguide.com

About

The Accessible Guide is a Community Interest Company that was founded and is managed by disabled people with lived experiences of exclusion and the barriers to inclusion that exist in our society.

We launched theaccessibleguide.com in March 2022, that showcases businesses and their access and inclusivity provisions, using factual information that allows users to find services and venues that meet their individual access requirements.

We have produced this Language & Disability document to educate and support businesses to become more inclusive and welcoming to disabled people.

Disability Facts & Figures



14.1M

Disabled People in the UK



£274B

Combined Spending power of Disabled People in the UK



1 in 5

Potential customers have a disability



75%

of Disabled People & their families have walked away from a UK business due to accessibility issues or customer service

Importance of Inclusive Language



As a company, The Accessible Guide adopts the Social Model of Disability and this reflects the language we use.

It is important to use language that is positive and inclusive as this can help enable businesses to create an inclusive and welcoming environment, something that will improve their image and reputation

This information is not exhaustive but is designed to educate businesses and individuals the importance of adopting a culture of using inclusive language.

Discrimination through language can be detrimental to a business and can be harmful to individuals, it could also be unlawful.

Person first language is often used in professional settings, this approach focuses on putting the individual first and would use the term person with a disability. The Social Model of Disability is an identity first approach and would therefore use the term disabled person.

The Social Model of Disability recognises the barriers that disabled people face are 'social and physical' that cause 'disability' and it is not impairments that force exclusion. These barriers may be attitudinal, intellectual, sensory or physical.

Disability

It is important not to define people by their disability or condition and individuals should never be labelled as a victim or special due to their health condition. It is equally important to avoid negative phrases such as 'suffers from' which suggests pain and discomfort and 'vulnerable' which implies an inherent weakness and feeble.

The following guide is not exhaustive but is an example of the language businesses should adopt to help create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for disabled people.

Terms/Words to Avoid

The disabled, handicapped people

Wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair

The deaf

The blind

Diabetic, suffers from diabetes

Victim of dementia, battling with dementia

Fits and spells

Disabled toilet

Able-bodied

Replace With

Disabled people/person

Wheelchair User

People with hearing impairments / deaf people

People with visual impairments / blind people / partially sighted people

Person with diabetes

People living with dementia

Seizures

Accessible toilet

Non-disabled person

Mental Health

It is easy to overlook attitudes and language around mental health and it is important to recognise the language used because everybody has mental health. It is important to be considerate and respectful as poor choices of language can be detrimental and impact the mental health of people.

As with disability related language it is important to not define people by their condition or mental health. The use of person centred language can prevent labelling individuals with mental health problems.

Terms/Words to Avoid

Mental disorder or mental illness

Struggles of suffers with depression

Suffers or struggles with anxiety

Struggles with bi-polar

Replace With

Mental health issues, mental health condition

A person with depression

A person with anxiety

A person with bi-polar disorder

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is a word used to explain the unique ways the human brain works. While everyone's brain develops similarly, no two brains function just alike. Being neurodivergent means having a brain that works differently from the average or "neurotypical" person.

Neurodiversity, or neurodevelopmental disorders, are the more recent 'umbrella' term to replace the term learning difficulties.

Terms/Words to Avoid

Suffers from ADHD

Dyslexic

Autistic

Austism Spectrum Disorder

Replace With

A person with ADHD

A person with Dyslexia

A person with Autism

Autism Spectrum (it is important to remember the word 'disorder' could be offensive to some people with Autisum).

Communicating with Disabled People

For businesses it is important to be positive about disability. There are many barriers to inclusion that disabled people encounter on a daily basis, many of the barriers are physical and there is legislation in place to tackle the inequalities that disabled people face.

The Accessible Guide was founded and is managed by disabled people with lived experiences of exclusion and the barriers to inclusion that exist in our society. It is still noticeable when people do not engage or communicate with a disabled person, for businesses and service providers it is important that you're able to speak to a disabled person in the same manner you would with a non-disabled person. We understand that many individuals may be concerned about saying the wrong thing and causing offence or distress and this is why they may seek to avoid a disabled person.

A key thing for service providers is to ensure you always speak directly to a disabled person, especially if they are with other non-disabled people.

A few other hints and tips include;

- Always speak directly to a disabled person and not the person they're with.
- Be polite and don't rush the conversation.
- Ask the person if there is anything that will help communication.
- Never pretend to understand, if you're having difficulty, then consider asking yes or no questions.
- Only offer assistance if it seems necessary, please respect the person's wishes if the offer is declined.
- Please don't imply disabled people are special, superhuman or courageous.
- Relax and be yourself.