

Speaking with Awareness: "People-First" Language

Language shapes the way those around us speak and act toward one another and conveys the respect we have for others. The use of appropriate language about people with disabilities can be an important tool in building a community that accepts all people.

Appropriate language is both sensitive and accurate. VSAFL promotes the use of "people-first" language — language that puts the focus on the individual, rather than on a disability. "People-first" language helps us remember that people are unique individuals and that their abilities or disabilities are only part of who they are.

VSAFL offers trainings targeted to individuals who work directly with children and adults with disabilities. The goal of each training is to learn successful strategies so that all participants including those with disabilities experience success in and through the arts.



About VSA Florida (VSAFL)

Headquartered at the University of South Florida, VSAFL is a member of the international network of VSA, an affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. VSAFL was established in 1981 by the Florida Department of Education and the Florida Department of State.

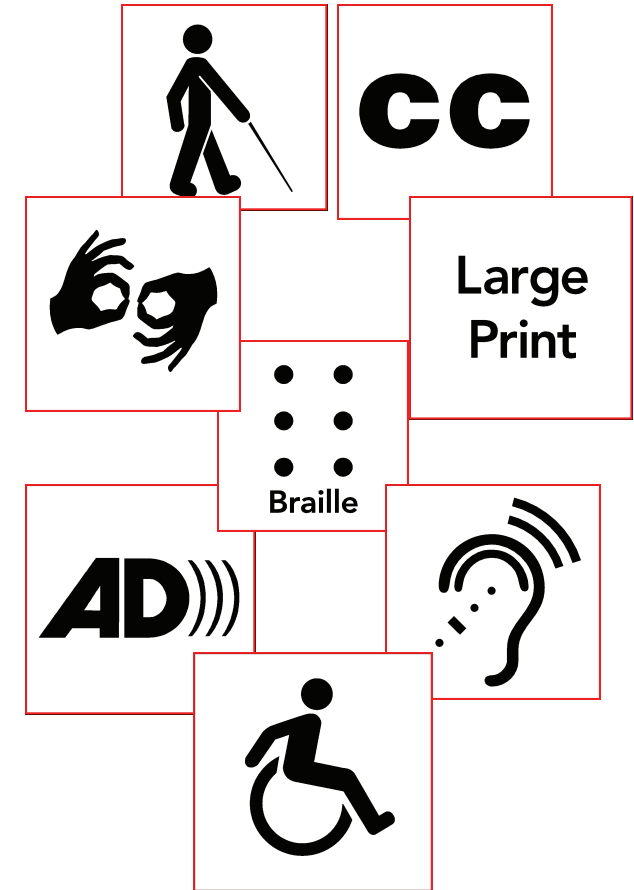
VSAFL's mission is to create a community where people with disabilities can learn through, participate in and enjoy the arts.

VSAFL provides educators, parents, and artists with resources and the tools to support arts programming in schools and communities. VSAFL showcases the accomplishments of artists with disabilities and promotes increased access to the arts for people with disabilities.

For more information or alternative formats, contact VSAFL

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A Guide to Using
People First
Language

Please consider the following when writing or speaking about people with disabilities:

- Do not focus on the disability unless it is crucial to a story. Avoid tear-jerking human interest stories.
- Do not portray successful people with disabilities as superhuman or heroes.
- Do not sensationalize a disability by saying afflicted with, crippled with, suffers from, victim of, and so on.
- Emphasize abilities, not limitations. Do not use emotional descriptors such as unfortunate, pitiful and so forth.
- Do not use condescending euphemisms. They reinforce the idea that disabilities cannot be dealt with up front.
- Show people with disabilities as active participants of society. Portraying persons with disabilities interacting with nondisabled people helps break down barriers and open lines of communications.



Affirmative Phrase	Negative Phrase
Person with a disability	The handicapped or disabled
He has a cognitive disability.	He's mentally retarded.
She is on the autism spectrum.	She's autistic.
Person with mental illness	Crazy, Psycho, Lunatic
She has a learning disability.	She's learning disabled, slow
He has a physical disability.	He's a quadriplegic/crippled.
She's short of stature.	She's a dwarf or midget.
He has an emotional disability.	He's emotionally disturbed.
She uses a wheelchair or mobility chair.	She's wheelchair bound. She's confined to a wheelchair.
He receives special ed services.	He's in special ed.
Typical kids Kids without disabilities	Normal or healthy kids
Congenital disability	Birth defect
Brain injury	Brain damaged
Accessible parking	Handicapped parking
She needs or she uses	She has a problem with