



Madison Area Down Syndrome Society  
People First Language

MADSS operates with the knowledge that words are powerful. Words have the power to hurt, isolate and oppress individuals or entire segments of society. Throughout history, it has become necessary to change our language and the way in which we refer to individuals and groups to avoid further isolating those members of society. The time has come to reshape our language so that we may refer to people with disabilities and the disability community in a respectful and inclusive manner.

In choosing words about people with disabilities, the guiding principle must be to refer to the person first, not the disability. In place of saying "the disabled," it is preferable to say "people with disabilities." When referring to a person with Down syndrome, it is best to say 'Person with Down syndrome' vs. 'Down syndrome person'. In this way, our emphasis is placed on the person, not the disability.

It is only important to refer to the person's disability if it is relevant to the conversation or situation. Disability should not be the primary, defining characteristic of an individual but merely one aspect of the whole person.

The Madison Area Down Syndrome Society is committed to using People First language in all materials, statements, and interactions, and we strongly encourage the community at large to do the same.