

Preferred Language

The Canadian Down Syndrome Society is committed to ensuring that the Down syndrome community in Canada is valued, supported and that individuals with Down syndrome are given equitable opportunities to contribute to society as fully participating citizens. We work to empower Canadians with Down syndrome through raising awareness and by providing information about Down syndrome for all life stages from prenatal to retirement years. We foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity, worth and equal rights of all people.

The Canadian Down Syndrome Society supports the use of preferred language that respects the unique strengths and skills of people with Down syndrome. By using language that is respectful and informed, we can help build accepting communities in which all people are valued and participating citizens.

To emphasize the abilities and not the limitations, we support the following guiding principles:

- Use people-first language that describes who the person is first, not their disability. For example: instead of “a Down syndrome child,” it should be “a child with Down syndrome”.
- Avoid the use of incorrect terminology. A person “has” Down syndrome, it is not a disease or illness and they do not “suffer from” or are “afflicted by” Down syndrome.
- Do not use the terms “retarded,” “handicapped,” “challenged,” or “special needs.” The use of these inappropriate words can cause barriers between people. Instead, use the terms “intellectual disability” or “cognitive disability.”
- Avoid using stereotypes and generalizations when referring to people with Down syndrome. For example: “people with Down syndrome are always happy,” it is important to remember that people with Down syndrome, just like everybody else, experience a wide range of emotions.

Please quote fully and reference the Canadian Down Syndrome Society

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