

# UTAH DOWN SYNDROME FOUNDATION



## Down Syndrome Language Guidelines

Language is a reflection of how people see each other. We believe that when referring to an individual with Down syndrome, it is important to use language that is both accurate and respectful of the individual. People with Down syndrome should always be referred to as people first. Instead of a “Down syndrome child,” the correct wording is “a child with Down syndrome.” This is known as People First language. It places the individual before the disability, thereby emphasizing the person first and the disability second. People First language emphasizes respect for the individual.

Avoid using the term “Down’s child” or describing the condition as “Down’s”, as in “he has Down’s.” A baby born with Down syndrome is not a “Down’s baby” or a “baby with Down’s.” He/she is a baby with Down syndrome. Down syndrome is named for the English physician, Dr. John Langdon Down, who characterized the condition, but did not have it. We use the preferred spelling Down syndrome, rather than Down’s syndrome, as is common in England and other parts of Europe. While Down syndrome is listed in popular dictionaries with both spellings, the preferred usage in the United States is Down syndrome. This is because an “apostrophe s” connotes ownership or possession. The AP Stylebook recommends using “Down syndrome” as well.

It is also important to use correct terminology. People “have” Down syndrome, they do not “suffer from” it nor are they “afflicted by” it. It is not a disease. Down syndrome is a chromosomal condition resulting from an extra copy of the 21<sup>st</sup> chromosome. Similarly, when referring to peers, the correct term is “typical” peers as opposed to “normal” peers. Additionally, rather than using the term “mental retardation”, the preferred term is “intellectual or cognitive disability.”

People with Down syndrome are sometimes portrayed as being happy and loving all the time, or as “angels.” Avoid casting every person with Down syndrome as a superhuman model of humanity. They are unique individuals with unique personalities, and they experience a full range of emotions, just like everyone else.

You can help others use responsible language that reflects the dignity of people with Down syndrome. Words can create barriers and reinforce stereotypes. The UTAH DOWN SYNDROME FOUNDATION strongly believes in the importance of ensuring that correct language is used. A person is much more than a label or diagnosis. We ask that you help to educate others about the preferred way of referring to individuals with Down syndrome.

***Individuals with Down syndrome have unlimited potential when given proper support!***



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