

Information and advice

Disability Terminology



Why use appropriate terminology?

Using appropriate terminology is purely an expression of respect and understanding. This is vital throughout all areas of athletics so that we can ensure that all disabled people involved in athletics in every area and at every level are respected and valued. It is a common misconception that terminology is always changing, and the phrase 'political correctness gone mad' is widely used, but the reasoning behind appropriate terminology has not changed since the *Disability Discrimination Act* (DDA) 1995 was introduced.

Medical Model vs Social Model

The history of the 'disability movement' in the UK has played an important part in the development of terminology. With the introduction of the *Disability Discrimination Act* (DDA) 1995 we formally moved from a Medical Model to a Social Model.

The Medical Model, by definition concentrated on what a person 'can't do' because of their impairment. This led to a negative association which considered individuals only by their impairment and were therefore disabled by their impairment.

The Social Model, developed and supported by disabled people, shifted thinking to encourage society to be aware of whose responsibility it is to create an inclusive environment in which everyone can live. This relates to the physical environment, for example ramps for wheelchair users, as well as the need to change attitudes to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against. Disabled people are therefore

disabled by society and this is something that can be directly translated to athletics. We must take responsibility for creating an inclusive environment and ensuring that disabled people are involved in a sport that includes and integrates.

By adopting the Social Model to disability and using the functional approach to inclusion all disabled people can take part in athletics to their full potential.

Having moved away from the Medical Model, it is vital that we move away from references in our language to an individual's impairment, for example, "a wheelie good performance" was a popular headline, yet is inappropriate!

By using appropriate terminology we are not talking about being PC (politically correct), we are referring to:

- ◆ Knowledge and experience of working in the disability field
- ◆ Advice from disabled people themselves
- ◆ The natural evolution of language across time and geographic areas

Choosing language with care

Bear in mind that disabled people might refer to themselves or other disabled people using terminology which would be considered unacceptable if a non-disabled person used it, or even if another disabled person used it and they weren't associated with the group. Be very careful not to just replicate language you hear. It's important to also remember that language or words may not necessarily cause offense but there might be a more appropriate word or phrase to use.

A brief guide to the correct terminology

Using correct terminology will have the knock-on effect of creating an inclusive environment for disabled people; this is a brief guide to correct terminology within athletics:

- ◆ **Paralympian / Paralympic Athlete** – someone who has competed at a Paralympic Games
- ◆ **Paralympic Pathway** – pathway open to classifications and related events that are included in the Paralympic Games
- ◆ **Disability Athletics** – the sport of athletics in which a disabled athlete competes at any level. The sport may or may not be adapted for the individual to take part.
- ◆ **Disabled Athlete** – a disabled person participating in athletics at any level

- ◆ **Congenital Impairment** – an impairment that a person is born with
- ◆ **Acquired Impairment** – an impairment that a person acquires at some point after birth
- ◆ **Disability** – the way in which the impairment affects the individual due to social constraints
- ◆ **Impairment** – physical description
- ◆ **Visually impaired** – people who are blind or partially sighted
- ◆ **Learning Disability** – a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities which affects someone for their whole life
- ◆ **Learning Difficulty** – affects the way information is learned and processed but occurs independently of intelligence e.g. Dyslexia, ADHD, Autism, Aspergers

X Not appropriate	✓ Appropriate
Person with a disability	Disabled person
Wheelchair Bound	Wheelchair user
Able-bodied Normal	Non-Disabled
Handicapped	Disabled
Mentally disabled Retarded/ Retard	Intellectual/learning disability
Mentally ill	Has a mental health condition (state condition if known)
Para-Olympian	Paralympian
Suffers from...	Lives with/has... (state medical condition)
Disability	Impairment

For more information visit:

www.efds.co.uk/resources/case_studies/578_disability_models_and_language