



Fixing the Big Issues for Disabled People in Buckinghamshire

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Talking about Disability – A Style Guide

The medical model of disability

1. The medical model of disability, or the 'personal tragedy' model, was created by doctors. It sees disability as a problem for an individual, such as their inability to see or walk. The individual's problem *is* their disability.
2. Under the medical model, a disabled person is singled out as different and usually inferior because they are not as good as or the same as other people.
3. Terms such as 'handicapped', 'crippled', 'wheelchair-bound' or 'spastic' belong to the medical model because they label a person according to what is 'wrong with them'.
4. Euphemistic terms such as 'special', 'person with disability' or 'differently-abled' also belong to the medical model, because they too focus on the loss of physical or sensory ability.
5. Medical model 'solutions' to disability concentrate on trying to make disabled people just like everyone else or by providing 'special' or segregated welfare facilities and benefits.

The social model of disability

1. The social model of disability was created by disabled people themselves from the 1970s onward in reaction to the medical model. It is now the accepted model of disability for all UK government departments, local authorities, the British Paralympic Association and the International Paralympic Committee and underpins the Equality Act 2010 and its predecessors such as the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
2. If a person has reduced physical, sensory or cognitive ability, the social model defines this as their *impairment*, not their 'disability': people have impairments, not 'disabilities'.
3. The social model says that *disability* is caused by unnecessary barriers which prevent a person with an impairment from living freely and independently. Thus, a person with an impairment is disabled not by their impairment but by the barriers placed in their way.
4. Under the social model, the term '*disabled person*' means a person with an impairment who is disabled by society. Using the term 'disabled person' is a sign that you follow the social model. Not using this term is a sign that you are using the medical model.
5. The social model calls for satisfactory 'reasonable adjustments' to eliminate the barriers which disable people with impairments. This is also the line taken by equality law.
6. The social model acknowledges that people with an impairment are different to others, but does not condemn those with an impairment for their difference or say that having an impairment is inferior or abnormal.
7. The classic example to illustrate the social model is a person in a wheelchair at the foot of a flight of steps. The medical model says that the person is disabled because they can't walk up the steps. The social model says that the steps are disabling the person, not the impairment which means he has to use a wheelchair.

Basic Language Guidelines

1. Use ***disabled people*** as a collective noun for people with an impairment.
2. If you are referring specifically to an individual or group's medical condition or health condition, use the term '*impairment*', eg 'people with a visual impairment', or 'hearing impairment', or 'physical impairment'.

3. Use the term '*disabled*' to refer to a barrier to independent living, not a medical condition or health problem.
4. Use the term '*non-disabled*' to refer to people who do not have an impairment, not 'able-bodied'.
5. If in doubt, call BuDS on 01494 568 864 or e-mail info@buds.org.uk for advice

Terms to Avoid	Preferred Terms
Victim of...	Person who has...
Person with...	Person who experiences...
Crippled by...	Person who has...
Suffering from...	Person who has...
Afflicted by...	Person who has...
Wheelchair bound	Wheelchair user
Invalid	Disabled person
Mental	Disabled person
Handicapped	Disabled person
The disabled	Disabled people
The handicapped	Disabled people
Spastic	Person with cerebral palsy
Deaf and dumb	Deaf or hearing impaired person
Cripple or crippled	Disabled person or person with impaired or reduced mobility
The blind	Blind or visually impaired person
The deaf	Deaf people or hearing-impaired people
Mentally handicapped, backward, dull	Person with learning difficulty
Mongol	Person with learning difficulty
Retarded, idiot, imbecile, feeble-minded	Person with a developmental impairment or developmentally-impaired person
Mute, dummy	Speech impaired person or person with speech impairment
Mentally ill, mental patient, insane	Person with mental health impairment
Abnormal	Disabled person
Patient	Person
Special needs	Additional needs
Special	Disabled person or person with additional needs
Service User	Disabled person