

Preferred Language Guide

Social Awareness

One of the objectives the Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio (DSACO) seeks to accomplish is to raise awareness about Down syndrome. It is important that the misconceptions about this chromosomal disorder are corrected and, above all, that we call for all human beings – with or without disabilities – to be viewed in high regard and with dignity.

The Proper Use of Language for Down syndrome:

- Down vs. Down's – National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) uses the preferred spelling, Down syndrome, rather than Down's syndrome. While Down syndrome is listed in many dictionaries with both popular spellings (with or without an "apostrophe S"), the preferred usage in the United States is Down syndrome. This is because an "apostrophe S" connotes ownership or possession. Down syndrome is named for the English physician John Langdon Down, who characterized the condition, but did not have it. The AP Stylebook recommends using "Down syndrome" as well.
- People with Down syndrome should always be referred to as people first. Instead of "a Down syndrome baby", it should be "a baby with Down syndrome". Also avoid "Down's baby" and describing the condition as "Down's" as in, "He has Down's".
- Down syndrome is a condition or a syndrome, not a disease.
- People "have" Down syndrome, they do not "suffer from" and are not "afflicted by" it.
- While it is unfortunately clinically acceptable to say "mental retardation", it is more socially acceptable "Intellectual disability". Broadly, at a national, state and local level, the use of the word "retarded" is considered unacceptable, inappropriate language. Using this word is hurtful and suggests that people with disabilities are not competent.