



Addressing People with Intellectual Disabilities

A foremost element in any society is its ability to communicate. With many cultures having a healthy mix of different nationalities, races, backgrounds, abilities and disabilities, the meanings of words sometimes take a backseat to the interpretation of the words. With all good intentions, words can be taken out of context, or viewed a certain way that the communicator does not intend.

For years the Knights of Columbus has been a key partner in programs that help people with intellectual disabilities. It is important to understand that when dealing with the public and other groups who support your efforts, it is not only what you say, but how you say it.

When preparing publications and assisting with programs such as these, it's important that Knights use proper terminology.

Currently there is no phrase or terminology that is universally accepted as the proper or definitive way to refer to people who have intellectual disabilities. Different agencies, in different regions, have different acceptable terminology.

The Supreme Council office, following the lead of Special Olympics International, uses the term "People with Intellectual Disabilities."

The best rule of thumb for local councils is to use the terminology preferred in your local community or by the group with which your council works. When state and local councils put on a fund-raising event for people with intellectual disabilities, we should promote the causes that the money benefits. It is suggested that you promote your program and name your chairmen under the title "Program for People with Intellectual Disabilities" and "Chairman of Program for People with Intellectual Disabilities." Contact local groups to determine what is acceptable in your region.

Regardless of which phrase you use, remember to always put the person before the disability. You should not identify the person with a label, for a label can be disrespectful toward a person or persons. Remember, it is about the people, not the disability. People with disabilities, be it mental, physical or emotional, are still people. Speak or write of these individuals with the respect every human being deserves. Follow these guidelines and you will avoid many possible issues:

Never refer to people with intellectual disabilities as if they were children. Adults with intellectual disabilities should be spoken to and about as adults.

Do not use negative terms like "a victim of," "afflicted with," "suffering from," "retarded," "unfortunate," etc. when describing an individual with intellectual and/or physical disabilities.

Say that someone "uses a wheelchair" rather than someone "is crippled" or "is wheelchair bound."

Be careful not to imply disease when speaking or writing about someone with intellectual disabilities. He or she is not "sick" and you cannot "catch" the condition.

For more information on the appropriate terminology when referring to programs for people with intellectual disabilities, consult the *Getting Your Message Across Knights of Columbus Public Relations and Publicity Guide* (#2235).

The Knights of Columbus has a long-standing history of helping those with intellectual disabilities. Continue that tradition by adapting the terminology that shows your support.

Special Olympics Report

The Knights of Columbus has always had a close relationship with Special Olympics. To further track local councils' involvement, make sure that your council completes the [Partnership Profile Report with Special Olympics \(#4584\)](#) and submits it to the Supreme Council Office by January 31, 2009, with copies to the State Deputy, District Deputy, and the council's files.