



Preferred Language Guide

One of the objectives the Down Syndrome Association of the Valley (DSAV) seeks to accomplish is to raise awareness about Down syndrome. Labels or incorrect word choices can hurt, offend and limit. Therefore, DSAV strongly believes in the importances of ensuring that the correct language is used when talking or writing about individuals with Down syndrome.

DSAV promotes the use of Person First Language. 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”
- Just as people with chicken pox or cancer are not referred to as “a chicken pox kid” or “cancer child”, people with Down syndrome deserve the same respect.
- An individual with Down syndrome is an individual first and foremost. The emphasis should be on the person, not the disability. A person with Down syndrome has many other qualities and attributes that can be used to describe them.

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.

- Down syndrome is a condition or a syndrome, not a disease.
- It is important to use the correct terminology. A person “has” Down syndrome, they do not “suffer from” it and are not “afflicted by” it.
- “Intellectual disability” or “cognitive disability” has replaced “mental retardation” as the appropriate term.

If you have an additional questions please contact DSAV at 330-726-DSAV or info@dsav.org.