

Cerebral Palsy: Learning the Terminology

If your child has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, you're going to have to do a bit of studying to learn how the terminology associated with this group of disorders works. This isn't just medical; it's oftentimes social. This isn't about political correctness or about constantly changing the meanings of words and making good people sound bigoted. It's about the actual meaning of language and the evolution of how people with CP are treated in society.

People Are Not Conditions

There are some cases where people are referred to by the medical conditions they suffer and this can make for some awkwardness if you don't know when and where it's appropriate. For example, "diabetic", "hemophiliac" and "schizophrenic" are all perfectly acceptable, non-condescending terms. "Retarded", "crippled", "slow" and a whole host of other terms that were once in common usage are no longer acceptable, however. Remember that the person to whom you're referring is a human first. Therefore, someone with CP is a "person with CP" or someone who "suffers with CP". Never use the condition followed by "case": "CP case", for example. It's horribly condescending and insulting.

Language Evolves

Did you know that "retarded" was once acceptable in social contexts? It's really not anymore. It's considered to be dehumanizing. "Mental retardation" is still used medically, but it is not acceptable in most social situations. "Developmental disability" is the preferred term. Cognitive impairment or a specific name for whatever type of impairment applies is preferred in some situations, as well. Remember, the person is a "person with a cognitive impairment" or someone who "has a cognitive impairment". Never refer to someone as "retarded", "impaired" or "slow".

Specificity Matters

This is where things can get tricky, but if you know the person about whom you're speaking it's not too difficult to navigate this bit of etiquette. Words mean specific things. For example, someone who needs hearing aids to hear is not deaf, they're hearing impaired. Someone who cannot hear at all is deaf. Someone who uses a wheelchair occasionally to make life easier is mobility impaired, someone who needs one full time is unable to walk, wheelchair-bound or is disabled. Learning which term is accurate comes down to getting to know the person. Terms like "hard of hearing" and "has a hard time hearing" are completely fine.

Contact a [Dallas cerebral palsy attorney](#) if you believe that [birth injuries](#) that led to your child's condition were the results of medical negligence.