

“If a culture’s language is full of pejorative metaphors about a group of people, that culture is not going to see those people as fully entitled to the same inclusion as people in a more favored group.”¹

In unpacking the narratives around disability, we must address ableism which is the systematic exclusion and oppression of people with disability, often expressed and reinforced through language. Ableist language refers to language that is offensive to people with disability and demonstrates the devaluation of people with disability. This document serves as a reference for everyday casual linguistic microaggressions.

Barren: Refers to people who are infertile and carries sexist connotations as well as ableist ones.

Blind to ____ / turn a blind eye to ____ / blinded by ignorance/bigotry/etc: Situates Blind people or people with visual impairments.

Crazy: people with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Cripple/Crippled (by ____): people with physical or mobility disabilities.

Deaf-Mute: Deaf or hard of hearing people

Deaf to ____ / turn a deaf ear to ____ / tone deaf etc.: Deaf or hard of hearing people

Differently Abled: Euphemism for disabled to avoid saying the word disabled.

Dumb: d/Deaf or hard of hearing people, people with speech-related disabilities, or people with linguistic or communication disorders or disabilities

Handicap(ped): people with physical or mobility disabilities, and is usually a euphemistic phrase to avoid saying "disability" or "disabled."

Idiot: People with intellectual and learning disabilities

Imbecile: People with intellectual and learning disabilities

Insane or Insanity: People with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

¹ Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg wrote on DisabilityandRepresentation.com

Invalid (as a noun, as in "my neighbor is an invalid and never goes outside") People with physical or mobility disabilities or chronic health conditions.

Lame: People with physical or mobility disabilities.

Loony/Loony Bin: Refers to people with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Lunatic: people with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Madhouse/Mad/Madman: An institution housing people with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Manic: Someone with bipolar (used to be called manic depression).

Maniac: People with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Midget: Little people or people with small stature or a form of dwarfism

Moron(ic): People with intellectual and learning disabilities.

Nuts: People with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Psycho: People with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Psychopath(ic): People with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Psycho(tic): People with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Retard(ed)/[anything]-tard (examples: libtard, fucktard, etc.): People with intellectual disabilities.

[you belong on the] Short-bus/ that's short-bus material/etc.: People with intellectual, learning, or other mental disabilities.

Spaz(zed): People with cerebral palsy or similar neurological disabilities.

Special Needs/[anything]-special: People with learning, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, but can mean any person with a disability. Used as a euphemistic phrase to avoid saying "disability" or "disabled." Needs aren't special, society chooses whose needs are worthy of accomodating.

Stupid: People with intellectual disabilities (i.e. "in a stupor").



Suffers from_____: Can refer to any person with a disability. Disabled people can suffer from symptoms and they can suffer oppression as a result of how society treats them, but disability is not always synonymous with suffering. For some disability is an identity.

Wacko/Whacko: People with mental or psychiatric disabilities.

Wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair: Rather than bind or confine people with mobility disabilities, wheelchairs create access. Wheelchair user is the preferred descriptor.

