



Preferred Language Guide

The mission of North Carolina Down Syndrome Alliance is to empower, connect, and support the lifespan of individuals with Down syndrome, their families, and the community through outreach, advocacy, and education in North Carolina.



For more information about Down syndrome and NCDSA, visit www.ncdsalliance.org or call 984-200-1193

When referring to people with Down syndrome

- People with Down syndrome should always be referred to as people first.
- Use “a child with Down syndrome” instead of “a Down syndrome child.” Also avoid “Down’s child” and describing the condition as “Down’s,” as in, “He has Down’s.”
- Down syndrome is a condition or a syndrome, Down syndrome is not a disease.
- People “have” Down syndrome, they do not “suffer from” and are not “afflicted by” it.
- “Typically developing” or “typical” is preferred over “normal.”
- “Intellectual disability” or “cognitive disability” has replaced “mental retardation” as the appropriate term to describe people both medically and socially.
- NCDSA strongly condemns the use of the word “retarded” in any derogatory context. Using this word is offensive and suggests that people with disabilities are not competent.



Is it Down or Down's?



- NCDSA uses the preferred spelling of Down syndrome.
- Down syndrome is named for the English physician John Langdon Down, who characterized the condition, but did not have Down syndrome. An “apostrophe s” connotes ownership or possession.
- 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. The AP Stylebook recommends using “Down syndrome” as well.

