



A GUIDE TO DISABILITY LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

March 2024



OVERVIEW

Please note: Some of the language included within this document is derogatory, offensive and may be deemed unlawful. This language has been used for educational purposes and to create awareness.

Language is continuously evolving, and in many cases, there isn't universal consensus over the use of certain words or phrases relating to disability. The aim of this resource is to provide readers with a broad overview, and we respect that people with a disability may have their own individual views on language. The terms and phrases used within this document are not exhaustive and are subject to change. We endeavour to review this document regularly, updating where appropriate.

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At the time of writing (February 2024), this season Kick It Out have already received **84% of the total amount of Ableist reports received in the entire 22/23 season.**

In collaboration with Level Playing Field, the leading charity for disabled sports fans in England and Wales, we have created this guide with the aim of enhancing knowledge and understanding around both advisable and avoidable language and terminology in specific relation to disability. We hope that by obtaining a better awareness, you will have a greater confidence when interacting with disabled people, not only across football but within wider society.

The use of discriminatory language is becoming more commonplace across all levels of the game, leaving those with a disability feeling targeted and unwelcome. We hope that this guide gives you the tools you need to know how to recognise and report any incidents of discrimination you may witness or be subject to.



ADVISED 

AVOID 

Out of the **158** Ableist reports Kick It Out has received since the **2019/20** season, **52.5%** related to **discriminatory language**.

Sometimes, knowing the right and wrong language to use can be daunting, and whilst it is important to recognise what is appropriate and inappropriate, it is even more important that you don't become fearful of getting it wrong and avoid interacting with disabled people altogether, as this can lead to individuals feeling neglected or ignored.

On the right, we have outlined a number of terms which are advised, and in the corresponding column, a list of terms that should be avoided.



Disabled person; person with a disability	Cripple; invalid
Disabled people	The handicapped; 'the disabled'
Has [name of condition]	Suffers from; suffers with; is afflicted by
Person who has diabetes/ depression/epilepsy etc.	A diabetic / depressive / epileptic etc.
Non-disabled	Able-bodied; 'normal'
Accessible toilet, accessible entrance, accessible parking	Disabled toilet, disabled entrance, disabled parking
Person with cerebral palsy	Spastic
Blind people; blind and partially-sighted people; people with visual impairments/sight loss	The blind
Deaf; person with a hearing impairment/hearing loss; BSL user	Deaf and dumb; Deaf mute



ADVISED

AVOID

Non-verbal	Mute
Person with a learning disability/disabilities	Retarded; mentally defective/handicapped
Person with a mental health condition	Mad; insane; mental case/patient
Autistic person; someone who is autistic or has an autism diagnosis	Suffers from/lives with autism
Seizure	Fits; spells; attacks
Someone of short stature	Dwarf; midget
Companion; personal assistant	Carer
Supporting documentation	Proof/evidence of disability

OFFENSIVE LANGUAGE

When thinking about language, it is important to know that the main words or phrases you should avoid using are those that suggest disabled people are helpless or victims, as well as the overtly offensive terms listed below.

This list isn't exhaustive, but does outline some of the disability-related terms most likely to cause offence in the UK:



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In most circumstances, it is rare that you will need to refer to someone's disability, but if you do, be sensitive when using words like **'disorder'**, **'impairment'**, **'abnormality'** and **'special'** to describe the nature of someone's disability. These words can be seen as patronising and judgemental.

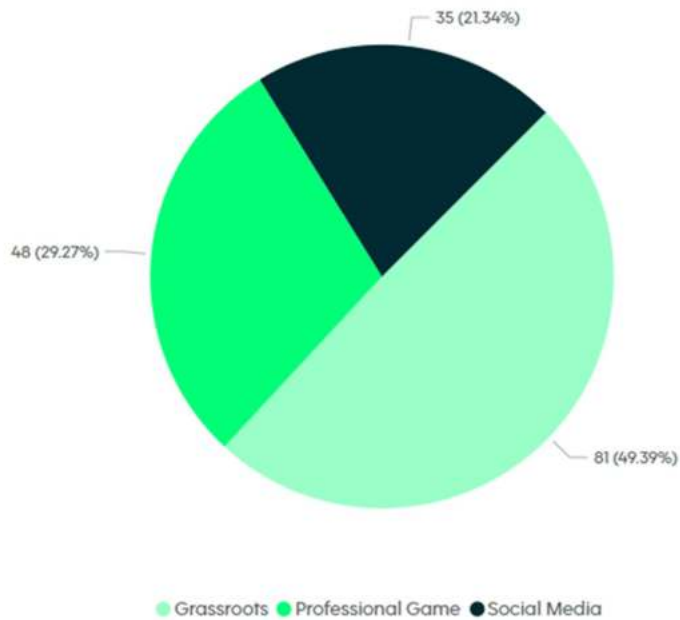
In most cases, using the word **'condition'** is a more suitable alternative, however there is no universal agreement on the use of these terms.

When speaking to a disabled person, it is generally better to take the lead from them when it comes to language. They may refer to their disability in a specific way, which may differ from someone else with the same disability. For example, you may refer to one person as **'visually impaired'** and to someone else as **'partially-sighted'**, depending on the individual's preference.

If you're ever not sure, then in most cases, it is perfectly acceptable to ask the disabled person which term they would prefer you to use.

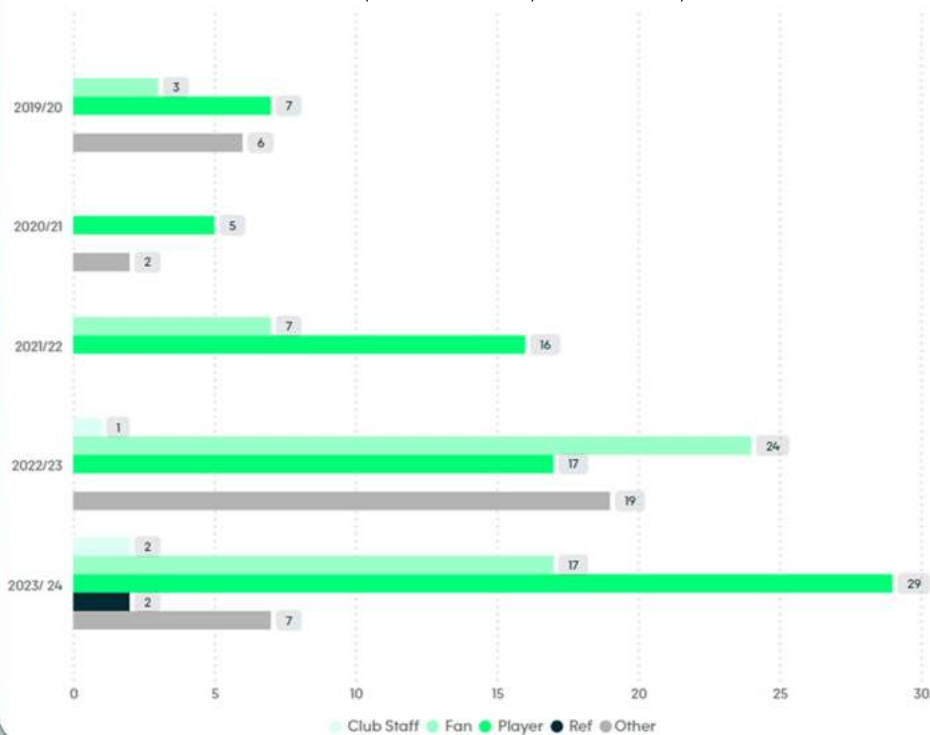
ABLEIST REPORTS

July 2019 to February 2024



ABLEIST REPORTS: ABUSE DIRECTED TOWARDS

All Ableist Reports Received, July 2019 to February 2024



DISCRIMINATION REPORTS ACROSS THE GAME

Looking at the reports Kick It Out have received over the past five years across grassroots to the professional game, as well as social media, there has been a distinct rise in disability related discriminatory incidents.

To date (February 2024), a total of **158** reports have been collated since the 2019/20 season. These incidents relate to discriminatory language, including the use of words and phrases outlined earlier in this resource, and abuse towards those with learning difficulties, physical disabilities and sensory disabilities. One in five reports are to do with exclusion/expulsion/discrimination because of neurodiversity.

At the time of writing (February 2024), this season Kick It Out have already received **84%** of the total amount of Ableist reports received in the entire 22/23 season. At Grassroots level, **43.4%** of the Ableist reports ever received have come in the first 7 months of this season.



“Regardless of what setting you are in it is not acceptable and people need to be held to account if they choose to act in this way. As a football community, we need to stand up to this kind of behaviour and tackle it head on.”

Owain Davies, Level Playing Field Chief Executive



LEVEL PLAYING FIELD RESEARCH

According to a survey conducted by Level Playing Field in 2022, looking at the types of abuse disabled people had experienced when attending away matches, 43% of fans stated they had experienced some form of disability abuse or negative attitude at an away game in the last 5 years.

Level Playing Field’s annual fan survey has also seen a year-on-year increase in the number of disabled supporters who identified disability abuse as a barrier to attending live sport.



HOW TO REPORT

Despite Kick It Out seeing a rise in reports across the game and on social media, there is still a large proportion of discriminatory incidents that are underreported.




Kick It Out have a simple reporting process, and whether you have heard, witnessed or been subject to discriminatory language or actions, it is important that you report it. We all have a responsibility to eradicate discrimination, and the more reports that are made can help lead to sanctions for those responsible.

You can report to us using our online reporting forms which are available on our website: www.kickitout.org/report.

Use our app

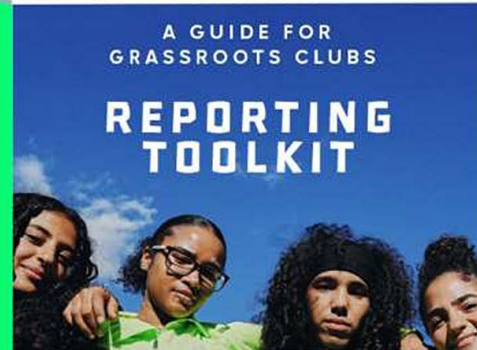


Email us: report@kickitout.org
Message us on social media

-  [kickitout](#)
-  [kickitout](#)
-  [kickitoutofficial](#)
-  [kickitoutofficial](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you work or play within a grassroots setting, you can also refer to our useful Reporting Toolkit for Grassroots Clubs.



Click the link below to access:
<https://bit.ly/49uQTyX>

If you have any additional questions around our reporting procedures, please contact report@kickitout.org

In addition, if you are a disabled sports fan and want to find out more about stadium accessibility and attending live sport, or if you want to provide a review about a recent matchday experience, then you can get in touch with Level Playing Field at: info@levelplayingfield.org.uk / levelplayingfield.org.uk

To find out more, you can visit their social media channels:



-  [@lpftweets](#)
-  [@levelplayingfielduk](#)
-  [@LevelPlayingFieldSports](#)
-  [@levelplayingfielduk](#)