

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Inclusive language is language which recognizes that:

- People's experiences differ.
- Our shared language makes the experiences of dominant groups more visible than those of oppressed groups.
- People are empowered by having a language with which to express their lived experience.
- Language changes as cultural and social conditions change.
- Our language choices have the power to hurt and exclude others and to damage our personal relationships.
- Consciously changing our use of language can contribute to social change.

Inclusive language helps bring down barriers that can keep members of oppressed groups from accessing services and participating in social institutions. Culturally appropriate and non-gender-specific language should be used in professional documentation, clinic forms, educational materials and public health campaigns.

General Principles

Choose inclusiveness over grammatical correctness or linguistic grace.

- With a little thought, these need not conflict.

Call people what they want to be called.

- Individual and group preferences can change over time. Keep up to date.
- If you're not sure, ask.
- Contrary to the "sticks and stones" jingle, words *do* have the power to hurt. They also have the power to convey understanding and respect.

Take correction with grace. Your willingness to do so helps define you as an ally.

DON'T SAY: "I didn't mean anything by it." or "That's just political correctness."

- Such statements convey that you weren't thinking about what you were saying, didn't care enough to think about how your words would affect the other person, or think other considerations are more important.
- Our language says more about what we think than we are usually aware of, so choose language that reflects what you really *do* mean.
- Those who are excluded by others' language choices are the experts from whom others can learn.

DO SAY: "Oops...sorry. I won't say that again."

- Then follow through. If you're not sure why someone took exception to something you said, *ask*.