

How Do I Ensure My Language Is Inclusive?

Early Childhood Question Corner

To assist you in using inclusive language, keep in mind the following information and tips:

- Be aware of the power of your words. Some words you use can casually perpetuate stereotypical notions. Do you describe children as acting like a bunch of “wild Indians”? Do you ever call children by saying, “Come on guys,” even if you are talking to both boys and girls?
- Try to use gender-neutral language. Use plural pronouns, such as “they” and “them,” instead of strictly masculine pronouns such as “he” and “him” to model gender-free terms. Use words such as firefighter, flight attendant, garbage collector and humankind to replace the use of “man” as a generic noun or ending.
- When talking about people with disabilities, use the term “disability” and not “handicap” in part because of the negative stereotypes with which the term “handicap” has been identified. More importantly, concentrate on the person’s abilities, rather than their disability. Use “People First” language. Talk about the person first, and the disability second. For example, “woman who is blind,” not “blind woman,” and “man with a disability,” not “disabled man.” A disability is only one characteristic of a person.
- Think about questionable words that are a part of your everyday vocabulary and ask yourself, “How can I change the way I speak so it includes everyone and hurts no one?” In doing so, remind yourself to:

- Identify people by identity characteristics only when relevant. Very few situations require such identification.
 - Be aware of language that, to some people, has questionable racial or ethnic connotations. While a word or phrase may not be personally offensive to you, it may be to others.
 - Be aware of the possible negative implications of color symbolic words. Choose language and usage that does not offend people or reinforce bias. In some instances, black and yellow have become associated with the undesirable or negative. Examples: “black reputation” and “yellow coward.”
 - Substitute substantive information for ethnic clichés and avoid assuming that those from a certain heritage can teach others about it.
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Excerpted from *Bias-Free Foundations: Early Childhood Activities for Families* (2001, 8).