

DC Child & Family Services Agency

# Inclusive Language

## *Style Guide*

The words to use and the words to lose in public child welfare.



WE ARE WASHINGTON  
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DC MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

**DC Child and Family Services Agency**

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## INTRODUCTION

The DC Child & Family Services Agency (CFSA), its Private Agency and Community-Based partners will comprise a child and family well-being agency that is equitable, just, and centered on the voices and lived experiences of the children and families we serve. We vow to prioritize the identification and elimination of all forms of racism, dismantle all policies and practices rooted in privilege, and center on the voices and lived expertise of children, parents, caregivers, families, and their communities.

As CFSA and its partners move forward in both an internal journey to examine organizational culture and practices and external efforts to support families, there are some terms that are more inclusive than others. As the CFSA Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Glossary was created by the Shared Language & Understanding/Communications Subcommittee, some terms needed to be explained in context with other terms, including child well-being terms. Additionally, some terms are more strengths-based and healing-centered rather than coming from a deficit model. By shifting the focus to a strength-based and healing-centered model, it is expected that the members of the families served by CFSA and its partners will feel more empowered than if a deficit model is used. Taking a healing-centered approach in our language provides the opportunity to view trauma not only as an individual isolated experience but highlights the ways in which trauma and its healing are experienced collectively. A healing-centered approach fosters a sense of inclusivity and fosters an environment of well-being.

This style guide is intended to give CFSA staff, partner staff, and stakeholders a clear understanding of terms and to assist them in making more deliberate and accurate word choices in their writing and verbal interactions to better serve the children and families of Washington DC. This style guide is broken up into five sections for easy and effective reading, including CFSA's Administrations (to include out-of-home care provided by CFSA's Private Agency partners) and language shifts, DEIB-specific terms, general agency terms (specific to child welfare practice in DC), cross-systems terms across agencies (including but not limited to juvenile justice, mental health, substance abuse, and persons with disabilities), and behavioral descriptors (adjectives/descriptors of behaviors from children, youth, and families). CFSA recognizes there may be instances where comfortability of terminology ultimately comes down to the worldviews and perceptions of who is being communicated to. This is an opportunity to not only build shared language and understanding, but also to build respect and dignity among agency staff and stakeholders.

*Enhancing*

Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

*with*

**OUR LANGUAGE**



## SECTION I: DEIB-SPECIFIC TERMS

| Historic vs Preferred Language   | Additional Information  |
|--|---|
| <p>SAY <b>Black or African American Person</b>,<br/>NOT Colored<br/>NOT Person of Color (depending on situation) *</p> <p><i>*- There may be times when Person of Color is appropriate when discussing the collective experiences of anyone who is not white.</i></p>                          | <p>These two terms are not interchangeable. “Person of Color” refers to anyone who is not white. In using this term, people from many different backgrounds and cultures are lumped together with the effect of erasing their distinctive cultural identities. Further, it diminishes the extent to which Black/African American people have uniquely been and continue to be subjected to discrimination, from the period of slavery to the present.</p> <p>Additionally, COLORED harks back to an era of exclusion, when <a href="#">Jim Crow</a> laws were in full force and Black people were forced to use water fountains marked “colored.” In short, the term stirs up painful memories.</p>   |
| <p>SAY <b>Cultural Humility</b>,<br/>NOT Cultural Competence</p>   | <p>Cultural humility refers to a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and understanding that one’s perspective is limited by their culture. Additionally, there is a recognition of the power imbalance between groups and a desire to fix those power imbalances. Whereas “cultural competence” is limited to an understanding of cultural differences and valuing clients’ cultural beliefs but does not recognize power imbalances.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>LGBTQIA+ community</b>,<br/>NOT Gay community</p>  | <p>This term tends to combine people of differing gender identities and sexual orientation into one large group which minimizes their uniqueness and runs the risk of misidentifying multiple groups.</p> <p>An alternative term (dependent upon your level of comfort) is <b>Queer Community</b>, which is an all-inclusive term beyond gender identity and sexual orientation.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>Latinx</b>,<br/>NOT Spanish,</p> <p>Note on usage of Latin(a/o) *</p> <p><i>*-Please note that the best practice when possible is asking someone how they prefer to be identified and referring to them accordingly as “Latinx,” “Latin(a/o),” “Hispanic,” or something else</i></p> | <p>Latinx is the gender-neutral form of Latin(a/o). It is a flexible term that refers to diverse U.S. communities with Latin and Caribbean roots representing over 20 countries. It covers a variety of ethnic and cultural identities, informed by African, Asian, European and Indigenous ancestry, and offers the possibility of greater political power through a national identity.</p> <p>CFSA uses the term Latinx when referring to a group of individuals of mixed backgrounds, such as “Latinx neighborhood” or “Latinx community” or when an individual’s specific cultural background is unknown.</p> <p>The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” refer to groups based on shared ethnicity, culture, and identity rather than skin color, race, or other physical features.</p> <p><i>Hispanic</i> was coined by the federal government and refers to people with ancestry from Spain. Some argue that <i>Hispanic</i> reasserts a colonial dynamic or relationship with Spain and that</p> |

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|   | <p>it fails to acknowledge the existence of Indigenous, African, and Asian ancestry of peoples throughout Latin America.</p> <p>In some parts of the country, particularly the Midwest and the East Coast, it's commonplace to refer to a person who speaks Spanish and has Latin American roots as <i>Spanish</i>. The term doesn't carry much negative baggage, but it's factually inaccurate. Also, like many similar terms, it lumps diverse groups of people under an umbrella category. <i>Spanish</i> is quite specific: It refers to people from Spain.</p> <p>To call people from Panama, Ecuador, El Salvador, Cuba, and so on <i>Spanish</i> erases large swaths of racial backgrounds, designating multicultural people as European. It makes as much sense to refer to all Spanish speakers as <i>Spanish</i> as it does to refer to all English speakers as <i>English</i>.</p> <p>Latinx individuals have rarely used a single label to describe themselves. Many use country-based identities such as Guatemalan or Peruvian. Generation and location affect how people identify themselves. For example, Mexican Americans in California and the Southwest adopted the term Chican(a/o), Puerto Ricans may use the term Boricua.</p> |
| <p><b>SAY Undocumented Or Person Seeking Citizenship,</b><br/>NOT Alien or Illegal Immigrant</p>  | <p><i>Illegal</i> should only describe an action but not a person. In April 2021, the Biden administration instructed U.S. immigration enforcement agencies to replace the term "illegal alien" (which is used throughout U.S. immigration law) with "undocumented noncitizen." The notion of illegality plays a large role in constructing, perpetuating, and solidifying whiteness... illegality, like race, has historically functioned as a signifier of nonwhiteness and thereby marks entire communities.</p>   |
| <p><b>SAY Residents,</b><br/>NOT Citizens</p>   | <p><i>Citizen</i> tends to specify a person who legally belongs to a country, and <i>resident</i> is used, generally, for a person who is living in a particular locality. The term <i>resident</i> is often contrasted with <i>citizen</i>: it names a person who has a residence in a particular place but does not necessarily have the status of a citizen.</p>   |
| <p><b>SAY People of Color,</b><br/>NOT Minorities</p>   | <p><i>People of Color</i> is more inclusive of the various backgrounds of persons who are not white. This term should be utilized when referring to the shared experience of persons who are not white. <i>Minorities</i> implies less and the current most acceptable term is <i>Global Majority</i>.</p>  |
| <p><b>SAY Biracial, Multiracial, or Multi-ethnic*</b><br/>NOT Mulatto or Mixed</p> <p>*- Terms such as <i>biracial</i>, <i>multiracial</i>, <i>multi-ethnic</i> should be</p> | <p>Terms such as <i>Biracial</i>, <i>Multiracial</i>, <i>Multi-Ethnic</i> are usually deemed non-offensive and should be used situationally as it refers to a specific person and not interchangeably. <i>Mixed</i> is also often considered as non-offensive, but can be offensive to some populations, especially in relation to a white person referring to a person of color. Sometimes people use <i>Half-</i></p>   |

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| <p><i>used situationally as it refers to a specific person and not interchangeably. “Mixed” is not offensive to all can even be a preferred term for some, while it can be offensive to others.</i></p> | <p><i>Black or Half-White</i> to describe mixed-race people, but some biracial people believe these terms suggest that their heritage can be literally split down the middle like a pie chart, while they view their ancestry as completely fused. It’s safer to ask people what they wish to be called or listen to what they call themselves.</p> <p><i>Mulatto</i> arguably has the ugliest roots of antiquated ethnic terms. Historically used to describe the child of a Black person and a white person, the term originated from the Spanish word <i>mulato</i>, which came from the word <i>mula</i>, or mule, the offspring of a horse and a donkey—clearly an offensive and outdated term. However, people still use it from time to time.</p> |
| <p><b>SAY Asian Person or Asian People</b><br/>NOT Oriental</p>   | <p>When in doubt, use the term <a href="#">Asian person or Asian American</a>. However, if you know someone’s ethnicity, refer to them as <i>Korean, Japanese American, Chinese Canadian</i>, and so forth.</p> <p>Common complaints about using <i>Oriental</i> to describe individuals of Asian descent include that it should be reserved for objects, such as rugs, and not people and that it’s antiquated, akin to using <i>Negro</i> to describe a Black person.</p>  |
| <p><b>SAY Indigenous People or Native American People</b><br/>NOT Indian</p>  | <p>If you’re concerned about using <i>Indian</i>, consider saying “Indigenous people,” “Native people” or “First Nation” people instead. If you know a person’s tribal background, consider using Choctaw, Navajo, Lumbee, etc., instead of an umbrella term.</p> <p>While many <a href="#">Native Americans</a> refer to each other as Indians, many object to the term because it is associated with explorer <a href="#">Christopher Columbus</a>, who mistook the Caribbean islands for those of the Indian Ocean, known as the Indies.</p>  |
| <p><b>SAY systemically excluded,</b><br/>NOT underrepresented</p>   | <p>Underrepresentation in any space or situation is a result of systemic exclusion and should be called out and connected accordingly.</p>   |



## SECTION II: GENERAL AGENCY TERMS

| Historic vs Preferred Language  | Additional Information   |
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| <p>SAY <b>Families with Potential</b>, NOT At-Risk Families</p>   | <p><i>Families with potential</i> focuses on a family’s strengths, and stems from a more positive place to address a family’s needs. This foundational shift helps the family and the team who supports them build on what they have to be more goal oriented so the family can succeed. “At-risk family” focuses on the negatives and shifts the focus away from making positive changes.</p>   |
| <p>SAY <b>Family</b>, NOT Case</p>  | <p>Referring to a <i>case</i> as a <i>family</i> allows for person-first language and a humanistic approach to the family. Whenever possible, it is preferable to refer to the “family,” or the individuals in the family. When the legal status is being referred to, the term “case” is appropriate.</p>   |
| <p>SAY <b>Family Time</b>, NOT Visitation</p>   | <p><i>Family time</i> refers to a reunion when members of a family who are not residing together spend time together catching up and making memories together to maintain their relationships.</p> <p><i>Visitation</i> has a connotation of an official visit where one party inspects another, a more formal affair with certain constraints.</p> <p>Best practice is that while family time does have components of case management, its primary goal should be for the family to remain connected and engaged.</p>   |
| <p>SAY <b>in the community</b>, NOT In the field</p>  | <p><i>In the community</i> has a focus on the people who live there rather than our role. <i>In the field</i> can carry agricultural, industrial, historical trauma, and military connotations.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>Separation</b>, NOT Removal*</p> <p>*- DC Superior Court utilizes (and will continue to utilize) the term removal in court proceedings. CFSA staff and partners, should be intentional in utilizing the most supportive term.</p> | <p>When an investigation results in a child moving to another home, saying <i>separated</i> rather than <i>removed</i> from their home is preferred. <i>Removal</i> can have a negative connotation that can be associated with the child who has been transferred to a new placement. <i>Separation</i> indicates a more provisional state and recognizes that “separation” doesn’t end a family.</p>   |
| <p>SAY <b>Resource Parent OR Kinship Caregiver, Guardian, Adoptive Parent</b> (depending on situation)*</p> <p>*-This term is situational based on which term most accurately describes the youth in question.</p>                          | <p><i>Resource parent</i> is an umbrella term referring to an individual who is currently functioning as, or is in the process of becoming, a <i>licensed kinship caregiver, foster parent, respite provider, legal guardian, or adoptive parent</i>. <i>Resource Parent</i> characterizes the role of these individuals as being a resource for the children who have joined their family and to the biological parents of those children when possible.</p> <p><i>Kinship caregiver</i> indicates a family member or family friend who has been authorized to parent a child, who they have an established relationship with, while the child is in foster care.</p> <p><i>Adoptive parent</i> is one who has adopted a child who has been in foster care.</p> |

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| <p>SAY <b>Government-subsidized housing</b>,<br/>NOT Section 8</p>  | <p>There are historical negative connotations connected to the term <i>Section 8</i>. In Washington, DC government-subsidized housing is not solely connected to Section 8 of the United States Housing Act of 1937.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>Communities experiencing high levels of [X]</b>,<br/>NOT dangerous neighborhoods or high-risk neighborhoods</p> | <p>This term avoids reinforcing stereotypes that comes with using negative terms like <i>dangerous</i> or <i>high-risk</i> can stigmatize entire neighborhoods, contributing to discrimination and a sense of hopelessness. It speaks to what is occurring in the neighborhood not the people of the neighborhood. It allows us to treat the people who live in these areas with dignity, recognizing their resilience and capacity for growth rather than defining them by external perception of danger</p> |
| <p>SAY <b>economically disadvantaged</b>,<br/>NOT poor</p>  | <p>Utilizing <i>economically disadvantaged</i> speaks to family income below the federal poverty threshold. This focuses on the current circumstances rather than defining them by it.</p> <p>Many people find the terms poor or lower class as derogatory. Using poor can subtly suggest a lack of ability or potential. Using this term carries a connotation of inferiority. Making their financial status imply their worth or ability.</p>   |



The graphic features the word "Language" in a yellow, cursive font, positioned above a dark blue horizontal bar. Inside the bar, the word "EMPOWERS" is written in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

## SECTION III: BEHAVIORAL DESCRIPTORS

*(adjectives/descriptors of behaviors from children, youth, and families)*

Language matters. In this work, we must recognize the emotional toil that facing the separation of one's family may bring. We must be intentional in utilizing language that speaks to this response rather than labeling children, youth, parents, and caregivers based on their reaction to Agency involvement. This section highlights "buzzwords" with negative connotations typically said throughout the child welfare agency and suggests replacements that are centered in positive youth development and family empowerment. These terms were gathered by Georgetown Law in partnership with various juvenile justice organizations.

While reviewing this section, also consider the phrase *proxies for race*. A proxy for race is a variable, term, or other identifier that is suspected or known to be highly correlated to race. The term race can be interchanged with other terms such as gender and socioeconomic status. It is also known that historically, race can represent many factors, including historical, political, cultural, economic, and geographical factors. Proxies, whether race, gender, or socioeconomic, can lead to bias in the speaker, writer, listener, and/or reader. The historic language below are key examples of proxies for race, gender, and child welfare involvement. Additional Reading: [Risk as a Proxy for Race](#).

| Historic vs Preferred Language  | Additional Information  |
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| <p>SAY <b>assertive about opinions</b><br/>NOT aggressive</p>   | <p><i>Aggressive</i> labels the person in a way that sets up all interactions with current and future providers.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>struggling to meet expectations</b>,<br/>NOT defiant or non-compliant</p>                   | <p>The terms <i>defiant</i> and <i>non-compliant</i> suggest the person is intentionally refusing to participate in services, this does not take into consideration historical experiences, trauma, or other factors that may impact an inability (not unwillingness) to effectively engage.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>appears to be frustrated or having difficulty</b><br/>NOT disrespectful or oppositional</p> | <p>Both terms, <i>disrespectful</i> and <i>oppositional</i>, are subjective and do not speak directly to what is being observed. Inclusive practice focuses on taking an extra step to document what is being observed without adding negative labels or connotations.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>impassioned response</b><br/>NOT Loud</p>   | <p>Cultural burdens, systemic oppression, the colonization of language and body movements, have often led to children and families not being heard. Children, youth, parents, and caregivers have a right to be creative, colorful and passionate about their position on a subject without the fear of tone policing impacting their voice and right to be heard and engage in discussion. Uniqueness and impassioned responses will be celebrated.</p>                |
| <p>SAY <b>eager for an outcome or trying to figure things out</b><br/>NOT manipulative</p>            | <p><i>Manipulative</i> implies that a person is intentionally trying to be deceitful, plot, or coerce systems to give them something that they may not have earned or may not be entitled to. By using language such as eager for an outcome, it suggests that there is a positive effort, positive energy that was put in place that may yield the desired outcome for a client. By saying eager for a outcome, it leans into the energy of self-determination and</p> |



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|   | self-leadership. By trying to figure things out, a person is engaged, curious and invested in their outcome which is a skill that builds self-efficacy.  |
| SAY <b>struggling to connect</b><br>NOT resistant | Persons involved with child welfare have the right to self-determination and when we stay struggling to connect, we must be careful that we are not imposing our choices on children and families. All families have a right to make choices, and the social worker can continue to support autonomy in decision making. <i>Resistance</i> suggests an intentional refusal to engage with the social worker or Agency and removes the consideration of a trauma-response, self-determination, and family preservation.   |
| SAY <b>declined</b><br>NOT refused                | When we say a child, youth, parent, or caregiver refused, it has a negative connotation and may not capture the effort that was utilized to come to a decision. Typically, a child, youth, parent, or caregiver is able to explore options, compare and contrast outcomes and come to a decision that is based on their needs. By saying declined the effort that was put in to come to a decision is recognized. Declined implies that the options were explored, and a decision was made as opposed to a refusal which may suggest that the options were not explored. |

Language

MOTIVATES

## SECTION IV: CROSS-SYSTEMS TERMS

(including but not limited to juvenile justice, mental health, substance abuse, persons with disabilities)

| Historic vs Preferred Language  | Additional Information   |
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| <p>SAY <b>youth or person's first name (or preferred name)</b><br/>           NOT bodies<br/>           NOT drug addict or abuser<br/>           NOT drug dealer<br/>           NOT gang member<br/>           NOT inmate<br/>           NOT offender<br/>           NOT thug<br/>           NOT respondent<br/>           NOT delinquent<br/>           NOT juvenile</p> | <p>A person's first name or preferred name refers to the name in which they choose to be identified with, often reflecting their personal identity and cultural background. Saying the youth or person's first name is a thoughtful way to avoid negative stereotyping. It keeps the focus on the person rather than defining them by their association.</p> <p>In each context of a youth or person in need of support, utilizing their preferred name minimizes the stigma associated with the other terms listed here and recognizes that their actions do not define their entire identity.</p> <p>By changing our language, we are promoting a mindset that supports personal development, social justice, and a fairer, more compassionate society. It helps build rapport especially for professionals working in social services, education, or justice systems.</p> |
| <p>SAY <b>Mr./Mrs./Ms. with family/guardian's last name</b><br/>           NOT the mother, the father, or family member (when in court proceedings)</p>   | <p>Using Mr./Mrs./Ms. with a family member or guardian's last name instead of saying <i>the mother, the father, or family member</i> in court proceedings is important for maintaining respect, professionalism, and acknowledging the individual's role in a more dignified manner. It avoids reducing them to a generic label like <i>the mother</i> or <i>the father</i>, which can feel impersonal or dismissive, especially in formal settings like court.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>person with a disability</b><br/>           NOT handicapped, vulnerable, or afflicted with [X]</p>  | <p>Utilizing a person-centered approach ensures persons with disabilities are referred to with dignity and respect. These terms were provided by the DC Office of Disability Rights.</p>   |
| <p>SAY <b>blind or low vision</b><br/>           NOT visually impaired</p>  | <p>The term <i>visually impaired</i> should be avoided as it can be received as condescending to a person with this disability and can appear to be ableist. Using terms such as blind or low vision presents a more people-first language.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>in need of specialized medical care</b><br/>           NOT Medically fragile</p>  | <p>Children, youth, and adults with medical complexities should not be referred to as fragile as this term is typically used to refer to objects.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>neurodivergent/neurodiverse</b><br/>           NOT on the spectrum</p> <p>*Autism – while we are focused on person-first language many with in the autistic community prefer <i>autistic people</i>.</p> <p>*-Please note that the best practice when possible is</p>   | <p>The term neurodivergent refers to a person whose brain processes information in a way that is not typical of most individuals.</p> <p>The term on the spectrum can refer to certain kinds of unsettling behaviors that may be hurtful to an individual diagnosed with autism.</p>   |



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| <p>asking someone how they prefer to be identified and referring to them accordingly as “person with autism,” “autistic person,” “neurodivergent” or another term of personal preference. This consideration should especially apply in “lumping” different groups within the disabilities community not as a monolith.</p> |  |
| <p><b>SAY deaf or hard of hearing</b><br/>NOT hearing impaired</p>  | <p><i>Hearing Impaired</i> focuses on what an individual is incapable of doing or substandard versus the experience of organic and inorganic causes for hearing loss.</p>  |
| <p><b>SAY wheelchair user or scooter user</b><br/>NOT confined to a wheelchair or wheelchair bound</p>  | <p>Wheelchair bound implies that the person is restricted, helpless, and completely defined by their wheelchair.</p>   |
| <p><b>SAY intellectual or developmental disability</b><br/>NOT mentally retarded or slow or special needs</p>   | <p>Intellectual disability starts any time before a child turns 18 and is characterized by differences with both intellectual functioning or intelligence, which include the ability to learn, reason, problem solve, and other skills; and adaptive behavior, which includes everyday social and life skills.</p> <p>The term <i>developmental disabilities</i> is a broader category of often lifelong challenges that can be intellectual, physical, or both.</p> <p>The term <i>intellectual disability</i> is a respectful term that acknowledges a person's condition without being derogatory. In contrast, <i>slow</i> can be seen as demeaning or offensive, reducing a person's identity to a single characteristic.</p> |
| <p><b>SAY mental health condition or mental health disability</b><br/>NOT mentally ill or crazy or spaz</p>   | <p><i>Mental health condition</i> is a broader term that includes mental disorders and other mental states that can cause distress, impairment, or risk of self-harm. <i>Mental illness</i> is a general term that refers to conditions that affect a person's thinking, feeling, mood, or behavior.</p>   |
| <p><b>SAY accessible parking</b><br/>NOT handicap parking</p>   | <p><i>Accessible parking</i> focuses on the access provided to people with disabilities rather than labeling the person as <i>handicapped</i>. <i>Handicap</i> is considered outdated and can carry negative connotations, whereas <i>accessible</i> highlights the space's purpose and benefit.</p>   |
| <p><b>SAY person with [illness]</b><br/>NOT cancer victim</p>   | <p>[Illness] victim can imply helplessness or lack of control, which many people with an illness might not identify with. Using person with [illness] avoids labeling them in a way that suggests defeat or powerlessness. Persons with an illness often prefer language that acknowledges their condition without framing them as being defined by it or as passive recipients of their situation.</p>  |

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| <p>SPELL <b>D</b>eaf and <b>d</b>eaf</p>  | <p>When spelling <i>Deaf</i> or <i>deaf</i>, there is an important distinction.</p> <p><i>Deaf</i> (with an uppercase <i>D</i>) refers to individuals who identify with <i>Deaf culture</i>. This includes people who consider themselves part of a community that shares a language (like American Sign Language, or ASL) and cultural experiences unique to Deaf individuals.</p> <p><i>deaf</i> (with a lowercase "d") refers to the <i>medical condition</i> of hearing loss. It describes individuals with varying degrees of hearing impairment but does not imply an affiliation with Deaf culture.</p> <p>So, use <i>Deaf</i> when referring to cultural identity and community, and <i>deaf</i> when talking about the audiological condition or medical aspect of hearing loss.</p> |
| <p>SAY <b>person/someone with an addiction or person with substance abuse disorder</b><br/>NOT addict or abuser or junkie</p>               | <p>This word usage accurately and respectfully represents a youth or family member's identity and situation with mental health and substance use in a way which is person-first and centered in positive youth development and family empowerment. These terms were gathered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Agency.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>is in recovery or has been in recovery for [X] amount of years</b><br/>NOT is clean or has been clean for [X] amount of years</p> | <p><i>Clean</i> implies that the person was <i>dirty</i> before recovery, which can carry a moral judgment and reinforce stigma against those who have experienced substance use disorders. <i>In recovery</i> is a neutral, nonjudgmental term that respects the individual's ongoing journey without implying a negative past.</p>  |
| <p>SAY <b>positive (for drugs, when drug testing)</b><br/>NOT dirty</p>   | <p>Using neutral and precise language, such as <i>positive</i>, maintains professionalism in communication. It focuses on the factual outcome of the test rather than introducing subjective or judgmental language.</p> <p>The term <i>dirty</i> carries a negative connotation and implies moral judgment. It can perpetuate stigma against individuals who may have substance use issues or who have tested positive for drugs, even if they are using prescribed medications. The term <i>dirty</i> can make individuals feel shamed or marginalized.</p>   |
| <p>SAY <b>recurrence</b>,<br/>NOT relapse</p>   | <p><i>Recurrence</i> frames the experience as part of a larger, ongoing process of recovery, which can encourage empathy and support from others. It suggests that the journey toward recovery is not linear and that setbacks do not define an individual's progress or worth. The term <i>relapse</i> often carries a negative connotation, implying a failure or a return to a negative state.</p>   |
| <p>SAY <b>problematic use of drugs and alcohol</b><br/>NOT drug problem or drug habit</p>   | <p><i>Problematic use</i> is more descriptive and focuses on behavior rather than labeling the person, reducing stigma and promoting understanding. Terms like <i>drug problem</i> or <i>drug habit</i> are often</p>   |

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| stigmatizing and can imply personal failure or moral weakness. They tend to label the individual in a negative way, which can lead to shame and discrimination. |
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*Language*  
**SUPPORTS HEALING**

## SECTION V: STAAND LANGUAGE SHIFT

| FACES                     | STAAND  |
|---------------------------|---|
| Removal                   | <p><b>Separation</b></p> <p><i>Separation indicates a more provisional state and recognizes that separation doesn't end a family.</i></p>   |
| Collateral                | <p><b>Family Network</b></p> <p><i>While the family network can be seen as a asset to a family, referring to these supports as the family network expresses the level of support and connection among the family, extended family, and community.</i></p>   |
| Abscondence               | <p><b>Absent</b></p> <p><i>Not all youth who are absent from their resource home/location are in abscondence. Abscondence refers to hiding to avoid legal proceedings.</i></p>  |
| Emancipation              | <p><b>Aging Out</b></p> <p><i>When youth reach the age of 21 while in care, they age out, they are not emancipated (separated from their care network).</i></p>   |
| Clients                   | <p><b>Persons</b></p> <p><i>Being person-centered means referring to people as persons and not solely as service recipients.</i></p>  |
| Case                      | <p><b>Family</b></p> <p><i>The collective individuals we support are persons with lived experience, not just a circumstance or condition.</i></p>   |
| Hotline Call              | <p><b>Referral</b></p> <p><i>This provides more specificity of what occurred for the family to be brought to the attention of the child welfare system.</i></p>   |
| Entry Services            | <p><b>Office of Hotline and Investigations (OHI)</b></p> <p><i>Specifies the services provided in this administration.</i></p>  |
| Clinical Case Management  | <p><b>Office of In-Home and Out-of-Home Care</b></p> <p><i>Specifies the services provided in this administration.</i></p>  |
| Child Protective Services | <p><b>Investigations</b></p> <p><i>To support the shift to a focus on child and family well-being, investigations specify the activity that is being conducted. DC CFSA is not solely focused on protecting children but acting in a prevention role. Child Protective Services suggest DC CFSA is protecting children from their families.</i></p> |
| Safe Case Closure         | <p><b>Sustained Well-Being</b></p> <p><i>The goal of child welfare services is to enhance family well-being. These families are not cases, but networks who are thriving from CFSA and partner agency supports.</i></p>   |

## SOURCE MATERIAL

Much of the work included in this guide comes from the expertise of the DC CFSA DEIB Steering Committee, however, to supplement our knowledge, the following references were utilized to develop this guide. *The links provided are not endorsed or supported by DC CFSA but are open access for public use and for information purposes only.*

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### **70 Inclusive Language Principles that Will Make You a Better Recruiter**

Not just for recruiters, this article outlines 70 inclusive language principles, aiming to foster workplace inclusivity. It emphasizes avoiding biased terms, using gender-neutral language, and respecting cultural differences. For more details, visit the original article: [70 Inclusive Language Principles that Will Make You a Better Recruiter](#)

### **A Resource for Understanding Behavior & Understanding Language in Juvenile Court**

This resource from the Georgetown Clinical Law Clinic emphasizes the importance of using precise, respectful language when addressing juvenile cases. It encourages shifting from stigmatizing labels to trauma-informed terms to better understand behaviors and reduce harm, which helps to foster more equitable outcomes and ensures justice for vulnerable youth by acknowledging the developmental and social factors influencing their actions. Read the full article here: [A Resource for Understanding Behavior & Understanding Language in Juvenile Court](#)

### **CFSA DEIB Glossary**

As CFSA moves forward in both its internal journey to examine organizational culture and practices as well as its external efforts with our partners to address equity, it is critical that staff have a shared vocabulary to engage in meaningful communication to advance goals. Language is vital for change. This DEIB glossary is a living document of terminology that aims to increase shared understanding and promote conversations about equity. You can find the full DEIB Glossary here: [DC CFSA DEIB Glossary](#).

### **Eradicating the Label “Offender”**

The article critiques the use of the term *offender* in restorative justice and criminal justice systems. It argues that such labels undermine core restorative values like respect, interconnectedness, and hope by stigmatizing individuals and fostering exclusion. Alternatives such as "person who caused harm" are proposed to promote dignity and reintegration. For a deeper dive, check out the full article: [Eradicating the Label "Offender" from the Lexicon of Restorative Practices and Criminal Justice](#)

### **Family Manipulation: Signs, Tactics, and How to Respond**

This article explores family manipulation, describing tactics like guilt-tripping, gaslighting, and triangulation. It highlights how these behaviors can harm relationships and mental health. It offers strategies to recognize manipulation, set boundaries, and seek support, empowering readers to maintain healthier family dynamics and prioritize their emotional well-being. Read more here: [Family Manipulation: Signs, Tactics, and How to Respond](#)

### **How to Communicate with Your Team When They Resist Change**

This source discusses strategies for communicating with teams resistant to change. It emphasizes understanding employee concerns, using empathy, and fostering transparency. Readers are encouraged to highlight the benefits of change, actively listen to feedback, and involve everyone in decision-making, creating a collaborative environment to ease transitions effectively. Review this full resource here: [How to Communicate with Your Team When They Resist Change](#)

## **How to Create Clarity and Limit Resistance When You Communicate**

The article emphasizes the importance of repetition and varied communication methods to create clarity and reduce resistance. With employees, prospects, and clients, use multiple formats—visual, verbal, written—to reinforce messages. Full article: [How to Create Clarity and Limit Resistance When You Communicate](#)

## **How Can You Communicate with Someone Who is Resistant to Change?**

To effectively communicate with someone resistant to change, it's important to understand their perspective, actively listen to their concerns, and provide clear, empathetic explanations. Building trust and offering support can help alleviate their apprehensions and facilitate a more open dialogue about the proposed changes. Read more here: [How Can You Communicate with Someone Who is Resistant To Change?](#)

## **Speaking Your Truth: Dealing with Resistance**

When expressing your truth, encountering resistance is common. To navigate this, maintain your message confidently, even if repetition is necessary. Stay curious about the other person's perspective, as their resistance may stem from their own unarticulated truths. Review these tips by visiting: [Speaking Your Truth: Dealing with Resistance.](#)

## **Terms You Might Not Know Are Considered Racist**

The article discusses common terms with racist origins that are often used unknowingly. For example, referring to a Black man as a "boy" has historical roots in demeaning Black individuals. Similarly, the term "gypped" is derived from stereotypes about the Roma people, equating them with deceit. Find other terms here: [Terms You Might Not Know Are Considered Racist.](#)

## **Thug Is Not**

Ijeoma Oluo argues that labeling Black individuals as "thugs" perpetuates harmful stereotypes, justifying violence and systemic oppression. This term dehumanizes Black people, portraying them as inherently violent, and serves as a socially acceptable replacement for overtly racist language. Read more from Ijeoma here: [Thug Is Not](#)

## **Why Calling Individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder Manipulative is Harmful**

Labeling individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) as "manipulative" dismisses their experiences and perpetuates stigma. Behaviors often deemed manipulative are typically desperate attempts to avoid perceived abandonment, driven by intense emotional pain. Such mischaracterizations deter healthcare providers from offering necessary care, hindering access to treatment and recovery. Discover more here: [Why Calling Individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder Manipulative is Harmful.](#)

## **Why You Should Avoid These Racial Terms**

The article advises against using outdated racial terms like "Oriental," "Mulatto," "Negro," "Caucasian," and "Eskimo," as they can be offensive or inaccurate. It emphasizes the importance of using contemporary, respectful language when referring to different ethnic groups to promote inclusivity and understanding. Other terms to consider can be found here: [Why You Should Avoid These Racial Terms.](#)

## **Words Matter: Preferred Language for Talking About Addiction**

Often unintentionally, many people still talk about addiction in ways that are stigmatizing—meaning they use words that can portray someone with a substance use disorder (SUD) in a shameful or negative way and may prevent them from seeking treatment. With simple changes in language harmful stigma and negativity around SUD can be reduced or avoided. Full information can be found here: [Words Matter: Preferred Language for Talking about Addiction.](#)

## ADDITIONAL NEW LANGUAGE LEARNED

| Historic vs Preferred Language | Additional Information |
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