

Inclusive Language



PREGNANCY

AVOID

pregnant woman*
mom or dad*
husband or wife*
unborn baby/child

EMBRACE

pregnant person
parent
partner or spouse
pregnancy

REMINDER:

Language is always changing. These suggestions reflect current best practices.

ABORTION

AVOID

terminate the pregnancy
abort your baby
late-term abortion
chemical abortion
DIY/back alley abortion
surgical abortion

EMBRACE

end your pregnancy
have an abortion
abortion at “#” weeks
medication abortion
self-managed abortion
in-clinic or procedural
abortion

GENERAL TIPS:

Mirror the client’s language.

Don’t assume! Ask for clarification if you don’t know.

Apologize if you make a mistake.

ADOPTION

AVOID

gave up a child
real parents
adoptive parents
keep a child

EMBRACE

chose adoption
birth parents
parents
parent a child

*Gendered language like woman/man/mom can be used when referring to a client who uses these terms for themselves, but should be avoided when speaking generally about clients.

SUBSTANCE USE

AVOID

abuse
clean
addict/alcoholic
former addict

EMBRACE

use
not currently using
person with substance/alcohol use disorder
person in long-term recovery

HIV

AVOID

clean/dirty
HIV-positive
catch HIV/AIDS
full-blown AIDS
compliant

EMBRACE

knows their status
living with HIV
acquire HIV
AIDS or Stage 3 HIV
taking medication as prescribed

DOMESTIC OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE

AVOID

victim or battered
women's shelter
accused or claimed

EMBRACE

survivor*
shelter
reported

*Some clients feel empowered by the term "survivor;" others don't.
Never label someone's experience for them.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTHCARE

AVOID

well women's visit
breast exam
sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
clean/dirty
infected with [diagnosis]
risky or unprotected sex
"normal" in reference to a sexual activity

EMBRACE

annual exam
chest or breast exam*
sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
tested positive or negative
living with [diagnosis]
sexual contact
use specific terms* (e.g., penis and vagina sex)

* Terms like breast, vulva, vagina, etc. may not reflect the language some clients use. Provide space for the client to tell you how they want to refer to their own body parts.