



Every child and youth living life at their full potential



Don't say that

An inclusive language guide

Presented by Grandview Kids' Inclusivity, Diversity,
Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Committee



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Introduction

Language is a powerful tool, and wielding your words to convey your thoughts and feelings in a mindful and inclusive way takes practice. Did you know that words and phrases like "Blacklist," "Hold down the fort" and "Grandfathered in" have racist roots or connotations? Or that "sexual preference" and "homosexual" are outdated terms?

Many don't, and while we may not know the origins of all the words, terms and phrases we use, seeking out antiracist and inclusive resources to help build a more robust and mindful vocabulary remains important.

What is *inclusive language*?

Inclusive language is language that is respectful and promotes the acceptance and value of all people. It is language which is free from words, phrases or tones that demean, insult, exclude, stereotype, infantilize or trivialize people based on their membership of a certain group or because of a particular attribute.

Inclusive language is ***not*** about impinging on free speech or political correctness; it is about communicating in a way that is accessible and respectful and values, includes and empowers all members of your audience.

How to use this guide

Read the content in the slides in this guide to learn which of the most used words, terms and phrases (especially in professional settings) have racist roots or connotations or are not considered to be inclusive.

Note: this guide serves only as an entry point for the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA) Committee to engage in discourse surrounding inclusive language. Amendments to this guide or the creation of new inclusive language guides may further this discussion organization-wide.

Please remember that while this resource is meant to educate, it is not intended to prescribe alternative words, terms or phrases. The IDEA Committee urges you to reflect on your use of these words, terms and phrases and do your own research if you need help with what to say instead.

Words, terms and phrases

Stakeholder

In a colonial context, a stakeholder was the person who drove a stake into the land to demarcate the land s/he was occupying/stealing from Indigenous territories. Continued use of the term can be construed as disrespectful of Indigenous people as well as perpetuating colonization and re-traumatization.

Hold down the fort

Hold down the fort stems from settlers in North America building forts and guarding them against Native American intruders.

Brown bag

Within the Black community, colourism* is a significant problem that stems from slavery. Many slave owners raped enslaved women, producing biracial offspring of a lighter complexion. Slave owners gave preferential treatment to those whose complexion was a lighter brown and often their unclaimed children. A brown bag custom began in the 20th century, where a brown paper bag was placed at event entrances or merely held up to a person of color. If their skin color was darker than the bag, they were not permitted to enter or participate.

**Colourism* is the prejudice or discrimination especially within a racial or ethnic group favouring people with lighter skin over those with darker skin.

Blacklist/Whitelist

Language that puts a positive connotation on white/light and a negative or mysterious one on black/dark reinforces anti-Black and colourist stereotypes. Choose more direct language to get your point across.

Only use these words (light and dark) as literal visual descriptors (such as dark mode), not value judgments.

Conquer

This term has ties to colonization. Be mindful of how the idea of dominance—often of a people or place by force—shows up in words like this.

Cakewalk

The cakewalk was a dance performed for white people by Black people to mock how white people danced. What was being made fun of was the depiction of how Black people could not be like white people. These contests held by owners included a competition for cake among the Black people forced to participate. The dance was later made famous through minstrel shows.

Minstrel shows were theatrical shows performed by white people in black faces portraying Black people as lazy, lackadaisical and dumb. There were also Black-only minstrel shows that exploited Black people for the same reasons.

Grandfathered in

The American South created absurd voting requirements that targeted Black people and made it almost impossible to vote. The name for these requirements is the "Grandfather Clause." They wrote the Amendment in a way to imply the practice was not discriminatory. They created stringent new voter requirements such as literacy tests. These requirements did not apply to people who had voted before 1867. Slaves did not know they were free until June 19, 1865. However, slavery was abolished on January 1, 1863, making it nearly impossible for a person formally kept in captivity to be legally allowed to vote.

Peanut gallery

Historically, the peanut gallery was an area in the theatre with the cheapest seats and reserved mostly for Black people and less affluent immigrants. In the 19th and 20th-century Vaudeville theatres, theatre-goers would throw peanuts at the stage in disapproval of the performance. During these two centuries, no one wanted to be associated with the peanut gallery, and today the phrase "the peanut gallery" is used about people no one wants to listen to.

Powwow

A powwow is a sacred gathering of Indigenous people. Using it to refer to an informal meeting is offensive appropriation of a term of cultural importance.

Spirit Animal

A spirit guide or Spirit Helper is sacred and represents a larger spiritual culture within Indigenous and other cultures. It's not a reference to your inner personality.

Redline; redlining

Redlining refers to the discriminatory practices during the Jim Crow era (1877-1964) that sectioned off particular areas within cities based on race and then did not fund those areas nor include them in government-driven programs that helped communities flourish. The act of redlining led to the creation of current-day ghettos and barrios.

Tipping point

In the middle of the 20th century, the term tipping point became synonymous with *white flight*. As neighborhoods started to desegregate, white people reached a "tipping point" where they would think there were too many Black people present within their communities.

Sold down the river

This phrase originated in the Mississippi region of the U.S. during slave trading days. Enslaved people who caused trouble were sold from the northern slave states into the much harsher conditions on plantations in the lower Mississippi.

Well-spoken; articulate

To refer to a person of colour as "articulate" is to assume that the opposite is true (i.e., they have a dialect that is hard to understand). Even if intended as a compliment, avoid descriptors that imply assume inferiority or reinforce stereotypes.

White glove service

White glove service became popular after World War II when house servants were Black and given the role of butlers and housekeepers. The racist connotations trace back to minstrel shows where white people don Black face paint and white gloves imitating Black folks portraying them as happy-go-lucky simple people.

Homosexual

Because of the clinical history of the word “homosexual,” it is aggressively used by anti-LGBTQ activists to suggest that people attracted to the same sex are somehow diseased or psychologically/emotionally disordered – notions discredited by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association in the 1970s.

Please avoid using “homosexual” except in direct quotes. Please also avoid using “homosexual” as a style variation simply to avoid repeated use of the word “gay.” Many mainstream news outlets’ style guides restrict use of the term “homosexual.”

Sexual preference

The term “sexual preference” is typically used to inaccurately suggest that being attracted to the same sex is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured” or “changed.”

Gay rights; special rights

People who are 2SLGBTQIA+ are not asking for rights that are different from the rights everyone has. They are simply seeking full equality under the law and an end to discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

Gay, LGBTQ, Homosexual or Transgender lifestyle

There is no single “LGBTQ lifestyle.” 2SLGBTQIA+ people are diverse in the ways they lead their lives. The phrases “gay lifestyle,” “LGBTQ lifestyle,” “homosexual lifestyle,” and “transgender lifestyle” are used to denigrate 2SLGBTQIA+ people by inaccurately suggesting that their sexual orientation and/or gender identity is a choice and therefore can and should be “cured” or “changed.”

References



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Have questions about this guide?

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