

Words Matter

Agesim/ Pet Names

Biased language can negatively impact patient and consumer care. The words we use can influence patient experience, clinical decisions, and outcomes. Words can also hurt. Biased words can also affect what patients and consumers think of the care they are receiving. Our **Texas Health Promise Principle of caring** makes every interaction unique and memorable for our patients and consumers. **Words do matter.**

Texas Health is committed to using bias-free language. Texas Health also has a [DEI Glossary](#) that includes inclusive terms you can use. Use this resource to identify words you can change to reduce bias when referring to patients and consumers living with behavioral health conditions.



Instead of saying...	I will say...	Why it matters...
The elderly, elders, elderly people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use more neutral ("older people") and inclusive ("we" and "us") terms. • Older adults or people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some people do not like to think they fit in this group.
The aged	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use more neutral ("older people") and inclusive ("we" and "us") terms. • Persons over the age of 65 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a more factual way to describe a person's age.
Aging dependents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Saying "dependent" implies they are reliant.
Seniors, senior citizens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using more neutral ("older people") and inclusive ("we" and "us") terms. • Persons over the age of 65 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior citizen categorizes people, versus stating a fact.

Instead of saying...	I will say...	Why it matters...
Feeble	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weak 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stigmatizes aging This word can indicate a lack of respect.
Honey, Sweetie, Darling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the person's preferred name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a term of endearment can be condescending. This word can indicate a lack of respect.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the person's preferred name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using this term can be condescending.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the person's preferred name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using this term can be condescending. This word can indicate a lack of respect.
Girl, ladies, sister	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child, person, individual Use the person's preferred name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using this term can be condescending. Removes assumptions of gender and friendship. Shows respect.
Boy, men, brother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child, person, individual Use the person's preferred name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using this term can be condescending. Removes assumptions of gender or relationship status.
Babe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the person's preferred name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using this term can be condescending.
Friend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the person's preferred name. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows respect.

How to Apologize for Ageism or Pet Name Insensitivity

Scripting: (greet patient and introduce yourself)

"I wanted to speak with you about spoken/written words that we should not have used. I am speaking for your entire care team when I say that we apologize for this mistake. It is very important to us that you are always respected while in our care. We are taking steps to make sure this doesn't happen again."

SOURCES:

National Center to Reframe Aging. (n. d.). Reframing aging initiative: Countering ageism by changing how we talk about aging. Gerontological Society of America. Retrieved May 11, 2023 from <https://www.reframingaging.org/>

Van Vleck, M. (2022, February 28). Age-inclusive language: Are you using it in your writing and everyday speech? Washington University in St. Louis Institute for Public Health. Retrieved May 11, 2023 from <https://publichealth.wustl.edu/age-inclusive-language-are-you-using-it-in-your-writing-and-everyday-speech/#:~:text=Terms%20such%20as%20older%20persons,65%20years%20old%20and%20older>

World Health Organization. (2021, March 18). Ageing: Ageism. Retrieved May 11, 2023 from <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism>