



# AABC Inclusive Language Guidelines



# American Association of Birth Centers Inclusive Language Guidelines

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# AABC Statement

## Foreword

In an effort to continue doing work that aligns with our [mission and values](#), AABC has enthusiastically decided to adopt and expand upon the American Psychological Association's [Inclusive Language Guidelines](#). We believe in the profound relationship between language and our beliefs, practices, and well-being. The aim of our Inclusive Language Guidelines is to provide community members with an up-to-date, living document for learning and implementing inclusive language. We believe that utilizing these guidelines empowers all of us to offer the most equitable, accessible, and competent birth center care with the widest reach to our communities.

## Plan

Moving forward with our diversity and inclusion efforts, AABC commits to implementing this inclusive language across our programs and resources, as well as recommending that outside presenters and educators do the same. As the APA's Inclusive Language Guidelines exist as a [living document](#) that will continue to change, AABC's Guidelines will undergo a review process every two years, including reviews of the APA's most recent adaptations.

## Flexibility, Change & Individuality

Language is ever changing, and AABC recognizes that the rapid adaptation of language can feel intimidating and overwhelming. We collectively enter this space with humility and positive intent, respecting that community members will put forth their best efforts in this process. The purpose of this work is to actively engage in the learning needed to honor diverse communities without the expectation of perfection. We hope that you will grant our team, as well as yourselves, the space to continue growing as language does; using mistakes as an opportunity for learning.

While these guidelines aim to be comprehensive, flexible, and thoughtful, it is always encouraged to check in with the individuals we work with. The APA guidelines offer a variety of ways to phrase inclusive statements to cater to the individuality of language. Each individual we encounter will have their own lived experiences that influence their language preferences, and we honor that by asking the people we serve their preferences. We hope that these guidelines help you to enter these conversations with openness and humility.

# APA Guidelines Overview

[Link to APA's Inclusive Language Guidelines](#)

## Highlights

The APA's Inclusive Language Guidelines highlights a few key aspects of using equitable language:

### 1) General Terminology on Equity & Power

- a) General terms associated with the historical disempowerment of certain communities
- b) Language surrounding allyship/accompliceship for, and cultural understanding of, historically marginalized communities

### 2) Identity-Related Terms

- a) Person-first vs. Identity-first Language
  - Follow [this link](#) for more
  - Example: Many of the folks we serve receive Medicaid benefits. There may be people who prefer "beneficiary of Medicaid" or "Medical cardholder" to remove any possible perceived stigma around "Medicaid user."
- b) Age
- c) Body size
- d) Disability status
- e) Neurodiversity
- f) Race, ethnicity, and culture
- g) Sexual orientation and gender diversity
- h) Socioeconomic status

### 3) Inappropriate Language Used in Conversation & Alternatives

- a) Culturally insensitive pejoratives
- b) Violent language
- c) Language that "doesn't say what we mean"

### 4) Maternal/Mother vs. Parent/Birthgiver/Pregnant Person

While many people who experience pregnancy identify as women and mothers, there are many others who do not resonate with those terms. Changing language around maternal/maternity is not meant to invalidate or minimize the experience of motherhood, but to expand language to include more people who give birth (i.e., transgender and nonbinary people assigned female at birth, intersex people, etc.).

# AABC Additions & Amendments

## GENDER & SEX

### Sex

A multidimensional construct based on **anatomy, physiology, genetics, and hormones**

Definition found at [National Institute of Health's Office of Research on Women's Health](#)

- Note from AABC: Sex is still a category that we have socially assigned to people at birth and is not inherently more “scientific” than, nor “superior” to, gender.

### Terms Related to Sex

**Assigned Sex at Birth:** Refers to the sex that is assigned to an infant, most often based on the infant's anatomical and other biological characteristics such as reproductive organs. (Source: [UW Medicine](#))

Some sex designations include:

- Male/Assigned Male at Birth
- Female/Assigned Female at Birth
- **Intersex:** General term used for a variety of presentations in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't seem to fit the typical definitions of female or male (Source: [Intersex Society of America](#))

### Gender

A multidimensional construct influenced by **sociocultural factors** surrounding appearance, behaviors, and characteristics associated with masculinity, femininity, and androgyny; encompasses societal expectations/beliefs, as well as gender identity and expression. (Source: [National Institute of Health's Office of Research on Women's Health](#))

### Terms Related to Gender

**Gender Expression:** The representation of gender as expressed through one's name, pronouns, clothing, hairstyle, behavior, voice, or similar characteristics. Gender expression may or may not conform to gender stereotypes, norms, and expectations in a given culture or historical period. Terms associated with gender expression include, but are not limited to, androgynous, butch, female/woman/feminine, femme, gender non-conforming, male/man/masculine, or non-binary (Source: [nyc.gov](#))

**Gender Identity:** The identifier someone uses to communicate how they understand their personal gender, navigate within or outside our societal gender systems, and/or desire to be perceived by others (man, woman, nonbinary, agender, etc.) (Source: [The ABC's of LGBT+ by Ash Hardell](#))

# BIRTH JUSTICE & EQUITY

## Birth Equity

Birth equity is the assurance of the conditions of optimal births for all people with a willingness to address racial and social inequalities in a sustained effort. (Source: [Joia Crear-Perry, MD, FACOG](#))

## Birth Justice

A movement that believes when birthing people recognize their innate power to make the best health decisions for themselves and their families during all stages of the pregnancy, birth, and the post-birth period, that power will have a transformational impact on their family and community (Source: [Voices for Birth Justice](#))

## Obstetric Racism

“Obstetric racism lies at the intersection of obstetric violence and medical racism. Obstetric violence is a form of gender-based violence experienced by people giving birth who are subjected to acts of violence that result in their being subordinated because they are obstetric patients. The term suggests that institutional violence and violence against women coalesces during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum” (Source: [Davis, 2018](#))

## Reproductive Justice

The human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities

- Reproductive justice is about **access to resources** such as contraception, comprehensive sex education, STI prevention and care, alternative birth options, adequate prenatal and pregnancy care, domestic violence assistance, adequate wages to support our families, safe homes, and so much more (Source: [Sister Song](#))