

Inclusive Language

Human Development & Sexual Health - Grades 4-12

Language matters. Language is complex, evolving, and powerful. Inclusive language includes all people, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.

Using inclusive language:

- Creates safer, respectful, welcoming and caring school environments for students, families and staff.
- Represents all individuals more accurately.
- Makes learning more accessible to all students.
- Leads to better learning and social outcomes for all students.

Inclusive language is used when the gender of the person is unknown or when discussing a group of people of mixed genders. In the lesson plans, it often occurs when describing a scenario in which the gender of the person is not defined, so that people of any gender identity may feel included in the description. This includes using ‘they’ or ‘them’ as singular pronouns. While it may feel awkward at first, using “they” or “them” helps ensure everyone feel included in the classroom and the lesson. Using “s/he” or alternating the use of “she” and “he”, reinforces a binary view of gender, which does not include all gender identities.

Inclusive Strategies

Using inclusive language may feel like a big shift, but it’s important for creating respectful and supportive learning environments. Here are some strategies to help you incorporate inclusive language in your lessons:

- Use **“they/them/their”** as singular, gender-free pronouns.
 - Example: A person will often get more vaginal discharge before they get their first period.
- Avoid **gender labels** from people, body parts, processes and partners.
 - Example: If someone has a wet dream, they might notice a wet spot on their pajamas or sheets.
- Refer to **“sex assigned at birth”** rather than “biological sex” or just “sex”.

- Example: Everyone experiences some breast changes during puberty. For people assigned male at birth, the changes are usually temporary. For those assigned female, changes in shape and size are typically lasting.
- Acknowledge **diversity** when discussing anatomy.
 - Example: We're learning about 2 types of reproductive systems. Everyone is different, so some people might have a system that is different from the two examples we'll cover.
- Support students in **understanding inclusive language** according to their developmental level.
 - Example: "Assigned male at birth means that when a baby was born, the doctor saw they had a penis and said the baby is male. Most people who are assigned male are boys."
 - Example: "People usually get their first period in puberty. Only people with vaginas get periods."

Key Concepts

Understanding the following key concepts will support your use of inclusive language:

- **Assigned sex vs. gender identity:**
 - *Assigned sex* is determined at birth (male, female, or intersex) and is independent of gender.
 - *Gender identity* is an internal sense of being a girl/woman, boy/man, fluid, or no gender, regardless of assigned sex.
- **Cisgender and transgender:**
 - *Cisgender* refers to individuals whose gender identity matches their assigned sex at birth.
 - *Transgender (or trans)* describes individuals whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex. Related terms include non-binary, gender fluid, gender queer, and agender.
- **Inclusive terminology for body parts:**
 - Use terms like "bodies with a penis and testicles" or "bodies with a vulva and ovaries" instead relying on gender labels (boys or girls).
 - Example: Say "For those who have ovaries, menstruation usually begins between the ages of 8-18" instead of "Girls will go through menstruation".
- **2SLGBTQ+:**
 - Is an inclusive term that represents a diverse community of people who identify as Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and others whose sexual orientations or gender identities fall outside heterosexual or cisgender norms. The '2S' at the beginning stands for 'Two-Spirit,' a term used by some

Indigenous peoples to reflect unique cultural understandings of gender and sexuality. The '+' symbol acknowledges the spectrum of identities beyond these letters.

Goals of Inclusive Language

For many people, their gender matches the sex they were assigned at birth (cisgender). For others, their gender identity does not match the sex they were assigned at birth. They may use terms like transgender, trans, non-binary, gender fluid, gender queer, agender or others, to describe their gender identity. The umbrella term 'trans' is primarily used to describe people whose gender identity and sex assigned at birth differ. While this umbrella term does not fit everyone, the intention is to be inclusive as possible.

The intention of inclusive language is to use language that reflects these many possibilities. The intention is not to 'ban' the use of boy, girl, him, her, she or he. For example, when speaking to or about a student who identifies as a girl, using the terms she, her, and girl are perfectly acceptable. The goal is to expand who feels included when talking to or about groups of people.

Expanding Inclusive Language

Inclusive language goes beyond sexual health lessons. Inclusive language can be used in your classroom, your overall school environment and your interactions with other staff members, parents or caregivers.

Here are some examples of words that help with creating an inclusive class and school environment:

Instead of:	Use:
Mother or Father	Parent or Caregiver
Boyfriend or Girlfriend	Partner
Husband or Wife	Spouse
Boys and Girls	Class, Students, Everybody
Mankind	Humankind
Manmade	Artificial, Synthetic, Constructed
Forefathers	Ancestors
Chairman	Chair, Chairperson