Inclusive Language

Language matters. Inclusive language is used to include people of all genders and sexual orientations. Using inclusive language:

- Creates safer, respectful, welcoming and caring school environments for students, families and staff
- Is more accurate
- 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. Inclusive language is often used 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 the use of 'they' as a singular pronoun. It may feel awkward at first, but using 'they' can help everyone feel included in your classroom and the lesson. Using s/he or alternating the use of she and he, reinforces the notion of gender being a binary construct, which is not inclusive of all gender identities. To understand how inclusive language was used throughout our lesson plans, see Using the Lesson Plans.

Content translated into French is excepted, as French grammar does not allow for gender neutral language.

Inclusive Strategies

For most people, using inclusive language is a huge shift and will take some time to get used to. Don't worry about making mistakes, just make the effort. Your students will appreciate your intentions! Here are some strategies for using inclusive language in your sexual health lessons:

- Using "they/their" as a singular, gender free pronoun
  - e.g. People often get more vaginal discharge before they get their first period.
- Removing gender labels from people, parts, processes and partners
  - e.g. If someone has a wet dream, they might notice a wet spot on their pajamas or sheets.
- If it's ever necessary to refer to assigned sex, using the terms "sex assigned at birth" instead of the terms "sex" or "biological sex"
  - e.g. Everyone has some breast changes during puberty. For people who are assigned male at birth, the changes are usually temporary. For those assigned female, changes in shape and size are usually lasting.
- When talking about anatomy, always explicitly acknowledge diversity
  - e.g. We're learning about 2 types of reproductive systems. Everyone is different so some people might have a system that is different from the 2 examples we'll learn about here.

Depending on the cognitive or developmental level of your students, you may need to support students to understand inclusive language.

- e.g. "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."
- e.g. "People usually get their first period in puberty. Only people with vaginas get periods."

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, guardians 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
· 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

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.

For more information, go to the Sexual Orientation / Gender Identity & Expression section of the Additional Resources page.

Source: Inclusive Language - Teachers | Teaching Sexual Health