

SAFETY. POWER. SISTERHOOD.

**nyws**

# THE NYWS LANGUAGE GUIDE



## Language Guide/Matrix

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the NYWS Language Guide! As an organization with values centered on feminism, anti-racism, anti-oppression and trauma-informed values, we created this document to serve as a repository for our learnings about language when discussing issues pertaining to Violence Against Women (VAW) . Language is an important tool for all of us to communicate our thoughts and ideas and it is pertinent that we have the vocabulary, grammar, and semantics to convey information and opinions appropriately. We wanted to create and share a guide for how to use language in the context of the VAW sector.

This Language Guide is for staff, associates, partners, donors, consultants, and anyone connected to VAW organizations. This document is like a guiding buddy that will help you converse about and with NYWS in an effective and respectful manner. We do not position ourselves as experts, merely helping you design your own writing journey. We would also like to acknowledge that this is a working document; as we evolve, so does language, and our hope with this language guide is that as we are learning more effective ways to communicate and articulate as a VAW shelter, we will update and share.

### BASIC GUIDELINES

Guideline	Notes
Use gender-neutral language (they/them/theirs) whenever relating pronouns to residents/participants	We provide services to women, trans, and non-binary peoples and their kids, therefore gender-neutral language is a good practice to partake in. Further, when referring to an abstract individual, it is important to use gender-neutral language so as to avoid misgendering.

<p>Avoid language that is victimizing and/or based in saviourism, especially white saviourism.</p>	<p>Empowerment of survivors is a core principle in NYWS's Code of Ethics. We are facilitators of recovery, rather than healers - the healing is done by survivors in their own way and time and that should be recognized in writing. We recognize that survivors have the strength within themselves, and we only provide them with tools to realize their own healing potential.</p> <p>Before very communication, review your writing and think about to <i>whom</i> you are assigning power and agency- consciously or not.</p>
<p>Whenever referring to residents/participants at NYWS, we must say, "women, trans, non-binary individuals, and their kids"</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Kids are part of the definition of survivors at NYWS.</li> <li>2. We serve women, trans, and non-binary folks.</li> </ol>
<p>Avoid use of clichés when writing in the NYWS voice</p>	<p>The use of clichés can be harmless and at worst signal a lack of effort in descriptions but sometimes they can be harmful stereotypes that have underlying racist/misogynistic/heteronormative/ableist/oppressive tones. It is best to stay away from using those clichés.</p> <p>E.g., - Calling BIPOC women "loud" or "strong."  - Calling Asian women "obedient"  - "Gut-wrenching fear"  - "It was an uphill battle"</p>
<p>Spell out important acronyms, especially</p>	<p>It is important to spell out acronyms to identify the subject of the document properly. These acronyms often make huge swaths of demographics into a monolith and erase the</p>

2SLGBTQIA, BIPOC, etc.	<p>nuance of intersectional identities. At the very least, we can spell out the acronyms and ensure that each identity is articulated.</p> <p>2SLGBTQIA - two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual</p> <p>BIPOC - Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour</p>
Always identify Pronouns when referring to a person	<p>Recognising and addressing someone by their correct pronouns is an act of resistance to heteronormative structures of oppression and affirms their humanity. If you are unsure and unable to find out - use, they/they pronouns. However, the best practice is to always introduce yourself with your pronouns and ask for others'.</p> <p>DO NOT REFER TO A PERSON AS "IT."</p>
Allow each subject you mention their full humanity	<p>People are complex, they are intersectional. It is important that we allow anyone we talk about their complete person and identity, while recognizing their humanity.</p>

### WORDS TO AVOID

Words/Phrases to avoid	Alternatives
1. Victims	<p><b>Survivors</b>, if talking in general about someone who has experienced violence; or <b>residents/participants</b> if talking about individuals who use VAW services.</p>

	The term survivor allows us to affirm the ability of people who have been violated to live beyond this traumatic event.
2. Battered Women	<b>Assaulted Woman/Individual</b> Using “Assaulted” describes someone who has undergone abuse, while describing them as “Battered” has connotations of permanent damage through hard use, which is disempowering.
3. Underprivileged	<b>Disadvantaged</b> Using “Underprivileged” to refer to those who lack a privilege that someone else has, puts onus on the individual without that privilege. With using the term “Disadvantaged” the focus is shifted to the disadvantages rather than the individual.
4. Helpless (women)	<b>Vulnerable</b> (woman/individual) Vulnerability of a person puts the onus of harm on the environment instead of the person. Describing someone as “Helpless” on the other hand purports that they should be able to help themselves and are unable to do so.
5. Safe space	<b>Safer space</b> “Safer” denotes that there is space and opportunity for us to improve safety beyond current levels. “Safe” would mean that the space being described is devoid of any possibility of harm and there is no further improvements possible.

6. Needy/(Those) in need	<b>Need-based</b> (donations/gifts); “Need-based” helps us focus on how to fulfill the needs of survivors instead of characterizing them as people who have too many qualms/needs.
7. Natural Women	<b>Cis-Woman</b> Referring to Cis-Women as Natural Women implies that Trans-Women are “Unnatural.” The gender binary is a modern construct, and a spectrum of identity has always been in existence.
8. Feminine Hygiene Products	<b>Period Products or Menstrual Products;</b> Periods are not limited to females/women – anyone can have a period and thus we refer to products used during periods as “Period Products or Menstrual Products.”
9. Marginalized/Historically Oppressed	<b>Systemically Oppressed.</b> Using the term “Systemically Oppressed” acknowledges the oppressions perpetrated by systems of oppression like white supremacy, patriarchy, etc. Using the term “Historically Oppressed” puts the oppression in the past and erases current and ongoing harm
10. Homosexual	<b>Gay/Lesbian/Queer;</b> “Homosexual” refers to archaic medical terminology that was used to classify queer love and relationships as a medical deviation. By using gay,lesbian, and/or queer (as appropriate) we move closer to de-stigmatization
11. Born Female/Male	<b>Assigned Female/Male at Birth;</b> Calling someone AFAB or AMAB is

	factually correct in case of Trans or Non-Binary Individuals. The terms “Born Female or Male” further the non-fact that gender is decided by sex.
12. Transgender vs Normal Person	<b>Trans-gender vs Cis-gender Person;</b> Calling people who are cis-gendered “normal” perpetuates the wrongful idea that being trans-gender is abnormal
13. Disabled vs Normal Person	<b>Disabled vs Able-bodied Person:</b> We use “Able-bodied” to describe a person without physical disabilities because normality is not defined by one's experience of a disability
14. Mentally Challenged vs Normal Person	<b>Neurodivergent Individual vs Neurotypical Person;</b> Neurodiversity does not signify that a person experiences challenges or is deprived of mental ability – it captures the variation in human brains without pathologizing.
15. Racialized Person	<b>Racialization</b> To say someone is “Racialized” means that they have been perceived as a BIPOC individual. A good alternative is “Racialization” because it puts the onus on the person who has attributed someone else to be of a certain race and to have characteristics of that race. E.g. – The practice of carding in policing is based in racialization, wherein Black individuals are carded more often as they are misleadingly attributed to be more criminal than other individuals.

<p>16. Natives, Native People, Native Americans, Indians</p>	<p><b>Indigenous People</b> Terminology used on the left is often associated with being primitive and is not the chosen language used by Indigenous People. Using “Indigenous People” reminds us that this land is the home of these communities, and non-Indigenous people are settlers/immigrants/refugees.</p>
<p>17. Coloured Person</p>	<p><b>Person of Colour</b> The term “Coloured Person” has negative connotations as it was subtly used to particularly ‘other’ Black people and was coded language for describing someone who “did not belong.” And generally used as a term to degrade people of colour.</p>
<p>18. Abuser (Drug) or Drug User</p>	<p><b>Person Using Substances</b> The alternative offered here reinforces that the individual being referred to is using substances, but they are not a “user.” The term user or abuser attaches as a description to the individual, resulting in othering.</p>
<p>19. Homeless</p>	<p><b>Displaced or Unhoused.</b> Th term “homeless” has become associated with someone dangerous or harmful. The figure of <i>the homeless</i> also others the individual facing homelessness.</p>



## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Use these questions to guide your writing/editing when working on an NYWS document:

1. Does your document deal with or allude to an issue? Are you naming the issue? (Example – misogyny, patriarchy, colonialism, etc.)
2. Does your writing require special knowledge to understand it? If yes – are you making sure that this knowledge is not a pre-requisite to understand the document?
3. If you are engaging in storytelling – does the story, tell us something about NYWS? Is this the best way to show connections to NYWS?
4. If you are writing from another point of view (especially when power dynamics are involved or the individual identifies as a minority) – did you make sure the person is represented fairly, accurately, without prejudice? Did you by any chance write from your point of view, as in POV of someone with your characteristics and not that of the intended individual?

## ETHICAL STORY TELLING

When you are engaging in storytelling for NYWS, keep the following things in mind.

1. **Be aware of positionality and power dynamics of storyteller and listener;** Always be cognizant of what your positionality is as a storyteller in reference to the listener as well as the subjects of the story



## WHEEL OF INTERSECTIONALITY

In this visual, the innermost circle represents a person's unique circumstances, the second circle represents aspects of individual identity, the third circle represents different types of discrimination and attitudes that impact identity, and the outermost circle represents larger forces and structures that work together to reinforce exclusion.

Intersectionality Displayed in a Wheel Diagram

(Adapted from the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 2009)

2. **How do your own experiences inform the story; NYWS** encourages the use of personal experiences to inform your storytelling. When you do this, intentionally or unintentionally, you must be careful to not generalize or project your experiences onto other individuals/characters
3. **Stay away from tokenization:** Do not use minority communities/individuals as tokens to show our diversity; pay attention to what story each image, each DM, each caption is telling, especially when it refers to a minority group
4. **Do your Research:** Do background research on any topic you want to write about. Further, any claims you make, you should be able to corroborate that with sources available to you.
5. **Don't expect others to do the work for you:** DO NOT put the labour on systemically oppressed groups or individuals to educate you about systemic oppression. There are a lot of resources available on the internet and many experts who offer up their knowledge - make use of that

## Glossary

**Participants or Clients:** Individuals who access services at NYWS, including the emergency shelter and the Anne Marie D'Amico Community Collective. This term is inclusive of residents.

**Residents:** Individuals who reside at the emergency shelter at NYWS. All residents are participants of our services but not all participants/clients are residents of the shelter.

**Survivors:** Survivors of gender-based violence suffer devastating short- and long-term consequences to their physical and mental health. We use this term to refer to anyone, client at NYWS or not, who has experienced gender-based violence.

**Gender-Based Violence:** Gender-Based violence refers to **harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender or sexuality and/or their perceived gender and/or sexual identity**. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.

**Trauma Informed Approach:** A Trauma Informed Approach is the recognition of the prevalence of trauma and operating from the assumption of the existence of trauma without the need or expectation of disclosure.

**Harm Reduction:** Harm reduction is a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. We do not ban or exclude survivors from service for actively using substances and focus on disruptive behaviour rather than use.

**Abuse:** violence perpetrated on an individual with the intent of harm. This violence can be physical, mental, emotional, or structural.

**Abuser:** individual or group that perpetrates violence of any kind with the intent to cause harm

**Wrap-around Services:** Services that provide a comprehensive, holistic, youth and family-driven way of responding to the needs of the target population. This means that we are not only targeting short-term issues, but also focusing on fulfilling the needs of our participants for them to lead safer lives in the way that they want to.

**Violence Against Women:** The term violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to any female identifying or female presenting individual.

**Anti-Racism:** Anti-racism is a process of actively identifying and opposing racism. The goal of anti-racism is to challenge racism and actively change the policies, behaviours, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions around us. Anti-racism does not just mean the lack of racism, but it requires the active effort to dismantle racist structures and beliefs in society.

**Colonization:** Colonization is the process of settling among and establishing control over the Indigenous people of an area. In a colonial state, the colonizing power carries privilege that is unavailable and unattainable for the local indigenous population to achieve. Colonization usually includes economic exploitation, political control, and oppressive methods.

**Decolonization:** Historically, this term has meant the independence of colonial states. In current context it means the undoing of colonialism and its practices.

**Implicit Bias:** Implicit bias refers to attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious way, making them difficult to control. We all have synaptic/instant thought and reactions to things; when these thoughts are about something or someone and the thought comes from a perceived idea of their attributes (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.), they are based on an implicit bias. E.g., Giving more heed to the experiences of individuals of your own gender.

**Model Minority:** A model minority is a minority demographic who are perceived as achieving a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average, often used as examples against other minority groups. "This argument has most often been applied in America to contrast Asian Americans (particularly from East and some South Asian regions) and Jewish Americans against Black and Indigenous people, enforcing the idea that Asian and Jewish Americans are good law-abiding, productive citizens/immigrants, while promoting the stereotype that Indigenous people and African Americans are prone to crime and dependent on welfare."

**Racial Capitalism:** racial capitalism is the process of extracting social and economic value from the racial identity of another person, often a person of colour.

**Settler Colonialism:** The type of colonialism that functions through the replacement of indigenous populations with a settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty.

**Social Oppressions:** Unfair treatment of a person or group who is different from other individuals/groups. This kind of oppression is determined by social characteristics, like race, socioeconomic standing, gender, age, etc.

**Systemic Racism:** Systemic Racism operates through a network of systems and structures that have racist procedures and process, whether implicit or explicit.

**White Supremacy:** The belief that white people constitute a superior race and should therefore dominate society, typically to the exclusion or detriment of other racial and ethnic groups.

**Intimate Partner Violence:** Violence perpetrated by one's intimate partner, whether a domestic partner, a sexual partner, or an old partner. This violence can be sexual, emotional, or physical in nature.

**Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence is violence committed by someone in the victim's domestic circle. This includes partners and ex-partners, immediate family members, other relatives and family friends. The term 'domestic violence' is used when there is a close relationship between the abuser and the survivor.

**Culturally Specific:** Any practice that is informed by cultural identities of the population being served.

**Intersectionality:** Intersectionality is a framework for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages. It takes into account people's overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices they face.

**Anti-Carceral Feminism:** Punitive power is anchored in patriarchal approaches to safety and violence – hence we need to shift responses to state and interpersonal violence from the carceral state to the transformative potential of community-based responses rooted in care.

Here are links for words we may have missed –

[LGBTQ specific word guides](#)

<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/lgbt-terms/>

<http://thesafezoneproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/SZP-Language-DO-DONT-Handout.pdf>

[Disability specific resources](#)

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<https://www.disability.illinois.edu/academic-support/instructor-information/accessible-language-guide-disability-etiquette>

[http://www.humber.ca/makingaccessiblemedia/modules/06/transript/Final\\_Glossary.pdf](http://www.humber.ca/makingaccessiblemedia/modules/06/transript/Final_Glossary.pdf)

Incarcerated Persons-Specific Language Guide

<https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/04/03/inmate-prisoner-other-discussed>