



Below you'll find alternatives to commonly used words and phrases that may be outdated, incorrect, offensive or harmful.

| Instead of saying... | ...please use: | Why? |
|---|---|---|
| <p>FASD kid, person suffering from FASD, person living with FASD</p> <p>"My neighbor is an FASD kid."</p> | <p>Person with an FASD</p> <p>"My neighbor has an FASD."</p> | <p>Person-first language is the preference of most people with an FASD</p> |
| <p>Brain damage, brain damaged</p> <p>"His mom drank during pregnancy and he was born with brain damage."</p> | <p>(Person with a) brain injury</p> <p>"He had prenatal alcohol exposure and was born with a brain injury."</p> | <p>Person-first language, less stigmatizing</p> |
| <p>Mentally disabled, mental retardation</p> <p>"People with FASD are mentally disabled."</p> | <p>(Person with a) cognitive disability</p> <p>"Some people with FASD may have cognitive disabilities."</p> | <p>Person-first language; retardation is an outdated and offensive term</p> |



Instead of saying...

...please use:

Why?

"FASD is caused by a woman drinking alcohol while pregnant."

"FASD is caused by prenatal alcohol exposure."

Gender-neutral, less shaming, and focuses specifically on the cause: prenatal alcohol exposure

External brain

"I help her with a lot of things; I'm basically her external brain."

Support person

"I'm her support person; I help her with certain tasks."

Less stigmatizing, more accurate and neutral (people with FASD do not need an "extra brain")

Low functioning or high functioning

"She needs a lot of support because she's low functioning."

Lead with where an individual needs support rather than where they are "challenged"

"She has a tough time with abstract thinking and may need support with abstract concepts, but she is very skilled with language and doesn't need much support in writing and reading."

Less stigmatizing, focuses on the individual and their needs as opposed to their inabilities

Instead of saying...

...please use:

Why?

Attention-seeking
"They are very attention-seeking, and they always act out for it."

Connection-seeking or support-seeking
"What might seem like misbehaving could be connection-seeking or support-seeking."

Less stigmatizing, more empathetic and accurate

Normal
"FASD kids have different challenges than normal kids."

Neurotypical
"Children with FASD may have different challenges than their neurotypical peers."

Less stigmatizing

Pregnant woman/women
"Pregnant women shouldn't drink."

Pregnant person/people who are pregnant
"The safest choice for people who are pregnant is to not drink any alcohol."

Not all people who can become pregnant identify as women

Substance abuse
"She went to rehab for substance abuse."

Substance use or misuse
"She received treatment for substance use."

Less stigmatizing

Instead of saying...

...please use:

Why?

Unborn baby, developing baby

"Drinking during pregnancy can hurt an unborn baby."

Embryo or fetus
(depending on gestational age) or baby (if it will be a more effective/relatable term for the audience)

"Prenatal alcohol exposure can impact the baby's development."

Medically and legally accurate; avoids political language associated with pro-life or pro-choice movements (FASD is a non-partisan public health issue)

Moms-to-be

"Moms-to-be should avoid alcohol."

Anyone who is/could become pregnant

"The safest choice for anyone who is or may become pregnant is to not drink alcohol."

Gender-neutral

Breastfeeding

"Drinking alcohol while breastfeeding cannot cause an FASD."

Nursing

"Drinking alcohol while nursing cannot cause an FASD."

Gender-neutral

Instead of saying...

...please use:

Why?

Boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife
"Husbands can be supportive by not drinking while their wives are pregnant."

Partner
"Partners play a role in alcohol-free pregnancies: they can be supportive by not drinking for all 9 months."

Gender-neutral

Identifies as trans(gender), transgendered
"They might be interested in our LGBTQA+ support group because they identify as transgender."

Is trans(gender)
"They might be interested in our LGBTQA+ support group because they are trans."

More accurate; people don't "identify as" transgender, they are transgender

Preferred pronouns
"Sam's preferred pronouns are they/them/theirs."

Pronouns
"Sam's pronouns are they/them/theirs."

Pronouns aren't a preference; they are a part of a person's identity and must be respected

Instead of saying...

...please use:

Why?

Non-alcoholic drink

"She should have non-alcoholic drinks at her baby shower."

Alcohol-free drink, zero-proof drink

"I found a great zero-proof drink recipe for her baby shower!"

Avoids the term "alcoholic" which can be stigmatizing and/or triggering

Admitted to alcohol use

"The pregnant patient admitted to alcohol use during her check-up."

Confirmed prenatal alcohol exposure

"The patient confirmed prenatal alcohol exposure."

The term "admitted" implies that this is a confession of wrongdoing and has a moral judgment overtone

Addict, alcoholic, substance abuser, struggling with addiction

"Only alcoholics have children with FASD."

Person with an alcohol use disorder or substance use disorder

"Anyone who drinks during pregnancy can have a child with an FASD. People with an alcohol use disorder may need additional support to have an alcohol-free pregnancy."

Person-first language, less stigmatizing, more medically accurate

Instead of saying...

...please use:

Why?

Relapse
"Relapse is a part of recovery."

Recurrence of use or return to use
"Recurrence of use may occur as part of the disease of alcohol use disorder."

Less stigmatizing

Rehab
"I think she needs rehab."

Treatment center
"Has she considered a treatment center to get support?"

Less stigmatizing

Clean
"She's not using anymore; she's clean now."

Drug-free, alcohol-free, in recovery
"She has been alcohol-free for 2 years."

Less stigmatizing

Marijuana
"There was prenatal exposure to alcohol and marijuana."

Cannabis
"There was prenatal exposure to alcohol and cannabis."

Less stigmatizing as the term "marijuana" has a racist history

| Instead of saying... | ...please use: | Why? |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Mentally ill</p> <p>"They're mentally ill."</p> | <p>Has a mental illness or mental health condition, has been diagnosed with [specific condition]</p> <p>"They have been diagnosed with schizophrenia."</p> | <p>Less stigmatizing</p> |
| <p>Non-compliant</p> <p>"He won't do anything I say; he's non-compliant."</p> | <p>Person is choosing not to —</p> <p>"He's choosing not to take those actions. We're working together to find an option he prefers."</p> | <p>Less stigmatizing</p> |
| <p>Self-mutilation</p> <p>"They need help to stop self-mutilating."</p> | <p>Self-injury, self-harm</p> <p>"They need help to prevent self-harm."</p> | <p>Less triggering, Less stigmatizing</p> |

| Instead of saying... | ...please use: | Why? |
|--|---|--------------------------|
| <p>Committed suicide/Killed themselves</p> <p>"She committed suicide last week."</p> | <p>Died by suicide/Lost their life to suicide</p> <p>"She died by suicide last week."</p> | <p>Less stigmatizing</p> |

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11

Three Important Takeaways:

Use person-first language, unless otherwise specified.

When talking about disabilities, we generally recommend using person-first language, unless the person you're talking to has specified they prefer something else. Person-first language emphasizes the person first, not the disability (i.e., "a child with an FASD" rather than "an FASD kid"). However, some people with lived experiences do not identify with person-first language. For example, many autistic people prefer "autistic" instead of "person with autism." Always respect someone's identity and use the language that they find most accurate and empowering.

Be aware of language that perpetuates stigma and guilt.

Be careful not to use language that shames people who drank alcohol during pregnancy. Prenatal alcohol exposure is a complex public health issue, and there are many things that may lead to an alcohol-exposed pregnancy. People who consume alcohol during pregnancy do not seek to harm their children, and we do not want to use language that perpetuates stigma and guilt.

Be inclusive of all people who can become pregnant.

Not everyone who can become pregnant identifies as a woman. We encourage you to use gender-neutral language as often as possible; for example, "a pregnant person" rather than a "pregnant woman." This can be challenging because much of the current research available refers only to "women" (those assigned female at birth) when discussing the ability to become pregnant. When citing a specific study, we recommend using the same language used in the study.

Please note:

Language is fluid and ever-changing. Our guidelines will need to be updated as language evolves. Additionally, terminology may need to be adjusted depending on the audience that you are reaching. For example, if your audience is a group of health care providers, using a term like “embryo” or “fetus” would be appropriate. However, if you are talking to high school students, it might be more effective to use the term “baby.”

Sources:

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