

# RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF PEOPLE-FIRST LANGUAGE

Actor Portrayal



- Using inappropriate or inaccurate language to describe people living with HIV increases the amount of stigma and stress they can experience.<sup>1</sup>
- Putting the label before the person, as in the phrases “HIV-infected man” or “HIV-infected mother,” dehumanizes that individual, turns them into a disease or illness, and reinforces stigma.<sup>1</sup>

One way to address stigma is to use **people-first language**, which is language that puts a person before a diagnosis, describing what a person “has” rather than asserting what a person “is.”<sup>2</sup>

Stigmatizing or Inaccurate Language <sup>3</sup>	People-First Language <sup>3</sup>
HIV-infected, HIV or AIDS patient, AIDS or HIV carrier, Positives or HIVers	Person living with HIV: PLHIV, PLWH; never use “infected” when referring to a person
Died of AIDS, to die of AIDS	Died of AIDS-related illness, AIDS-related complications, end-stage HIV
AIDS virus/AIDS test	HIV/HIV test (AIDS is a diagnosis, not a virus)
Full-blown AIDS	There is no medical definition for this phrase; simply use the term “AIDS” or “Stage 3 HIV”
HIV virus	This is redundant; simply use the term “HIV”
HIV infection	HIV transmission; diagnosed with HIV
Became infected	Living with or acquired; diagnosed with
Serodiscordant couple	Serodifferent, or mixed-status couple
To catch AIDS, to contract AIDS, to transmit AIDS, to catch HIV	An AIDS diagnosis; developed AIDS, living with AIDS; now living with HIV (AIDS is a condition that results from HIV progression)
Compliant	Adherent
Promiscuous	This is a value judgment and should be avoided; use “multiple partners”

Continued

## Stigmatizing or Inaccurate Language<sup>3</sup>

## People-First Language<sup>3</sup>

Death sentence, fatal condition, or life-threatening condition

Avoid using; HIV is a chronic and manageable health condition as long as people are in care and receiving treatment

“Tainted” blood; “dirty” needles

Blood containing HIV; shared needles

Clean, as in “I am clean, are you”

Avoid using; referring to yourself or others as being “clean” suggests that those living with HIV are dirty

Zero new infections

Zero new transmissions/new cases

Number of infections

Number diagnosed with HIV/number of acquisitions

HIV-exposed infant

Infant exposed to HIV

Unprotected sex

Condomless sex; sex not protected by condoms or antiretroviral prevention methods

Mother-to-child transmission

Vertical transmission, perinatal transmission

AIDS orphans

Children orphaned by loss of parents or guardians who died of AIDS-related complications

Prostitute or prostitution

Sex worker, sale of sexual services, transactional sex

**Consider your own experiences with people in your setting.** Have you heard of any words or phrases not covered on this worksheet that were stigmatizing to others? If so, list them and list ways in which you can turn those words and phrases into people-first language.

Blank writing area for student responses.

**References:** 1. The Well Project. Why language matters: facing HIV in our own words. <https://www.thewellproject.org/hiv-information/why-language-matters-facing-hiv-stigma-our-own-words>. August 1, 2019. Accessed June 11, 2020. 2. CDC. Communicating with and about people with disabilities. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/materials/factsheets/fs-communicating-with-people.html#:~:text=People%2Dfirst%20language%20is%20the,remember%20that%20preferences%20can%20vary>. April 29, 2020. Accessed June 11, 2020. 3. Lynn V et al. HIV #LanguageMatters: addressing stigma by using preferred language. <https://www.hiveonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Anti-StigmaSign-Onletter-1.pdf>. Accessed June 11, 2020.