

Suggested Recommendations for Representative Language

By the Representation, Equity & Accessibility Committee. April, 2021.

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Introduction

In the spirit of Tradition Five - carrying the ACA message to the adult child who still suffers - this document identifies language used throughout ACA literature that we recommend to be changed to be more representative of the diversity of human identities. Representative language in program literature also supports Tradition One - ensuring our common welfare and promoting unity within ACA. We expect this to be a document that will evolve over time as our knowledge and education about these issues grow.

Gender Language

*When using these words
Possibly exclusive language*

Language that can be added for more inclusion

Words and Phrases to Avoid Using

she, he
her, him
herself, himself
woman, man
women, men
brother, sister
son(s), daughter(s)
“Mister or Miss right”
LGBT

Suggested Words to Use Instead

they
their, them
themselves, oneself
person
people
sibling
child, children
“the right person”
LGBTQ2SIA+/ LGBTQ+

LGBTQ2SIA+ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-spirit, Intersex, Asexual

One word/ letter version: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-spirit, Intersex, Asexual

Full version:

L: lesbian, G: gay, B: bisexual, T :trans/transgender/transsexual/transmasculine/transfeminine/transandrogynous,
Q: queer/questioning, 2: twospirit/2spirit, I: intersex, A: agender/asexual spectrum,
+ = femme, butch, pansexual, polyamorous, non-binary etc

Example:

“Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA)/Dysfunctional Families is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition program of men and women who grew up in dysfunctional homes.” (<https://adultchildren.org>, first page) becomes “Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA)/Dysfunctional Families is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition program of people who grew up in dysfunctional homes.”

“At some point the adult child realizes that her or she must seek a Higher Power...” (BRB, p. 223) becomes “At some point the adult child realizes that they must seek a Higher Power...”

Exceptions:

Any words or phrases can be used in personal shares. Mindfully attempt to collect and publish shares from people of different gender identities and sexual orientations (e.g. cisgender, transgender, non-binary, LGBTQ2S).

Why using the recommended language is important:

Some people see themselves as human beings first and a specific gender (e.g. female, male), second or not at all. This is especially relevant for people who identify as gender-queer, non-binary or transgender. “They” is the most common pronoun used by non-binary people in various countries around the world, and includes people who use “she”, “he”, and “ze”. The Big

Red Book already uses gender-representative language in many places, such as using the term “adult child” rather than “adult girl or boy.” The suggestions listed here expand on that foundation.

Romantic and/or Sexual Relationships Language

When using the words

spouse

marry/marriage/get married

Suggested Words to add

partner or spouse, partner/s, companion/s, significant other/s

enter into a relationship or marry

be in relation with them

Enter into a relationship with

become romantically and/or sexually involved

with, life partners, celebrate /become/ing life partners

romantic partners/partnership/got involved

with/partnered with them

Intimate companion

multiple partners

consensual multiple partners/polyamory

non-consensual multiple partners

Example:

“We either become alcoholics, marry them, or both...” (BRB, p. 648) becomes “We either become alcoholics, (live with them (partner may not mean living with them)), are in a relationship with them, or both...”

Exceptions:

Any words or phrases can be used in personal shares. Mindfully attempt to collect and publish shares from people with several different romantic and/or sexual relationship types and structures.

Why using the recommended language is important:

There are myriad types and structures of romantic and/or sexual relationships throughout the world. Many people are in relationships (long-term, short-term or otherwise) and are not married, and/or never plan to get married. Many people engage in relationship structures other than monogamy, such as polyamory, polyandry, or polygyny. Some countries do not allow marriage between queer people, and some people have trauma from being forced into marriage without their consent.

It is important to make the distinction between consensual multiple partners/polyamory and non-consensual multiple partners.

Additional Notes

We also recommend adding the terms “sexually aggressive” (overtly not safe) and “sexually suggestive” (covertly not safe) and “sexist” in “A hope for ACA beginners meeting handbook” and adding “sex and love addict” and/or “sex and love abuser” to the phrase “ladies’ man, player, gigolo, skirt chaser” in the Family Diagram Labels in Step One literature. We recommend adding the terms “man-eater,” “flirt,” “home-wrecker” and “sex and love addict” and/or “sex and love abuser,” as some people are familiar with those terms. While the existing language is gendered, we recognize its intention is to help adult children come out of denial about their family dysfunction, and that commonly used words and phrases are useful in that regard. It also provides an opportunity for adult children working the step to recognize the behaviour for what it is rather than using common phrases to minimize or trivialize it.

Family Relationship Language

Words Currently Used

parent(s)

Words to Use With Greater Frequency

parent and/or caregiver, caregiver(s)

Example:

“... there are some unique considerations for adults raised by parents who abused drugs” (BRB, p. 59) becomes “... there are some unique considerations for adults raised by parents and/or caregivers who abused drugs.”

Exceptions:

Any words or phrases can be used in personal shares. Mindfully attempt to collect and publish shares from people who come from a variety of different living situations in childhood.

Why using the recommended language is important:

Many people grow up in foster homes or orphanages, and/or are raised by family members other than their biological or adoptive parents, and/or live both with their parents and with other caregivers throughout their childhood for various reasons. This recommendation is not to eliminate the use of the word “parent”, but rather to use the word “caregiver,” or the phrase “parent and/or caregiver” more equitably throughout published content. This recommendation is in the same vein as the expansion of “Adult Children of Alcoholics” to “Adult Children of Alcoholics *and Dysfunctional Families*.”

Race-Based Language

Concepts and Words to Avoid/Reduce Using

Using “dark”, “darken”, or “dark night of the soul” as a metaphor and/or when talking about feelings

Using the word “light” as a metaphor and/or when talking about feelings

POC (People of Color)

Ethnic minority

Black and white thinking

Consider using instead

Use accurate descriptive words: hurt, hopeless, despair, depression, sad, lonely, difficult, challenging

Use accurate descriptive words: insightful, joyful, elated, buoyant, clarity

People of the global majority, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color)

People of the global majority (collective term for ethnic groups which constitute approximately 85 percent of the global population.

A collective term that first and foremost speaks to and encourages those so-called to think of themselves as belonging to the global majority. It refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous and or have been racialised as 'ethnic minorities'

All or nothing thinking

Example:

“...to those seeking God’s love and light” (BRB, p. 143) becomes “... to those seeking God’s love and insight.”

Exceptions:

Any words or phrases can be used in personal shares. Mindfully attempt to collect and publish shares that do not use racist words or phrases, or words or phrases with racist etymologies.

Why using the recommended language is important:

Using “dark” as equivalent to bad and “light” as equivalent to good (“the dark metaphor”) is a form of structural racism built into our fellowship language, with roots in the Oxford movement of the Christian religion. The word “dark” is appropriate for use in the context of illumination (e.g. “it’s dark outside tonight”), but it is not appropriate to use “dark” to imply that something is bad, wrong, difficult or challenging.

Dominant Culture Language

Concepts and Words to Avoid Using

“our culture”

Consider adding

Avoid generalizations about cultures
Be specific when using “culture”
Use some communities or cultures, many communities or cultures
And/or use a very specific phrase such as “Western modernity” when attributing characteristics to any specific culture.

Example:

“Self sufficiency is valued in our culture” (BRB, p.xxiii)

Why using the recommended language is important:

There is not a single world culture; the world has myriad cultures with all sorts of different values. It is not appropriate to assume what culture someone belongs to nor the values of their culture.

Exceptions:

Any words or phrases can be used in personal shares. Mindfully attempt to collect and publish shares that are either very culturally specific (i.e. it names the culture; e.g. “In my Latinx culture...”), or don’t mention culture at all. Avoid the use of shares that ascribe characteristics or traits to all people of a single race or national origin.

An alternative for “our culture” here could be Western modernity.

Place of origin or residence

When Using these words

Nation

Town, city

Consider adding

Place, land, nation, places I go to, homeland

Place, town, city

We do this to include indigenous cultures and people without nations or cities.

Spiritually inclusive language

When using these concepts and words

God or higher power

Prayers

Consider adding

higher power / higher powers
resources beyond our awareness
higher purpose
power/powers greater than ourselves
greater purpose
something bigger than us
greater consciousness
inner truth
knowing presence
mysteries of life
ancestors
greater loving power
Greater principles
Principles
Collective conscience
Wisdom of the program
Life
Universe
Love
...and god or higher power

Readings
Statements
Affirmations
Meditations
Mindfulness

For meetings:

This meeting invites spiritual inclusion by letting everybody use their own words of choice for a power greater than themselves, or refrain from using words, in texts and prayers where the word god or higher power is used now.

Spiritual Inclusion Working Group Final Deliverable

https://acawso.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-08_ACA_Spiritual_Inclusion_Working_Group_Fina.docx.pdf