COSUMNES
COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT

Inclusive Language Guide

Compiled by the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

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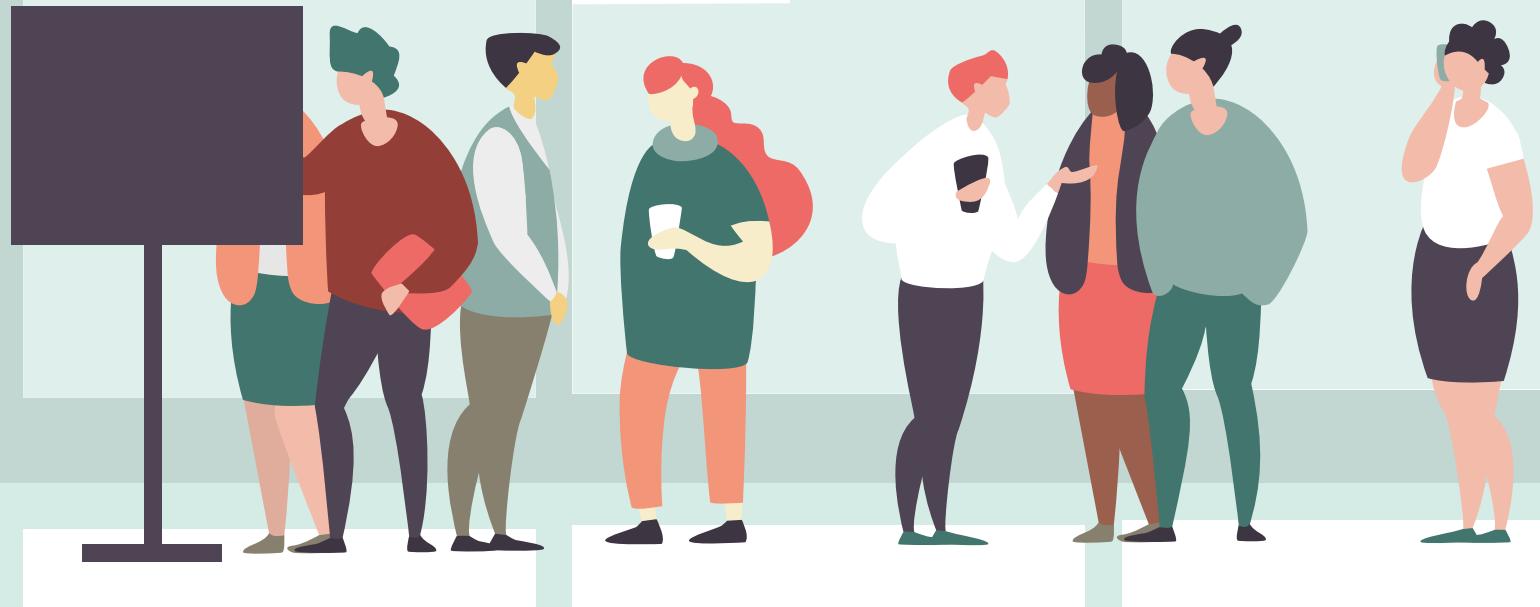
Acknowledgement

The District Inclusive Language Guide was complied through a collaborative effort between District staff and members of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee.

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Introduction

The Inclusive Language Guide provides a professional, unbiased guideline for communicating with the public. Inclusive language allows for use of respectful verbiage and terminology for communicating with people.

Our commitment is to provide superior fire, emergency medical, and parks & recreation services to our diverse Elk Grove and Galt communities. Cosumnes CSD will persist in ensuring that inclusive language is used in written and verbal forms of communicating.

We believe that having an inclusive practice will create a more welcoming environment for patrons and better working conditions for staff.

Our District is growing; as a result, we must remain flexible and adaptive while focusing on practices that will make our district a role model for inclusion.

Inclusive Language

Language has a powerful impact on shaping ideas, perceptions, and attitudes. Language can be used in a positive way by promoting feelings of respect and equality among people; however, it also can be used in the expression of prejudice or discrimination.

Demeaning, belittling, and negative words not only create barriers to understanding, but they can be offensive. Individuals must develop sensitivity to the ongoing changes in the appropriate use of language and adapt accordingly.

Cosumnes CSD strives to increase the cultural humility of staff.

Cultural Humility is a lifelong process. It involves the ongoing process of self-exploration and self-critique combined with the willingness to learn from other cultures. It focuses on self-humility rather than achieving a state of knowledge or awareness.

The purpose of this Guide is to encourage staff to educate themselves on cultural humility and actively use inclusive language when interacting with co-workers and community members.

This document highlights the need for understanding in the use of language within our workplace.

This Guide also provides examples of recommended terminology and inclusive language as well as examples of non-inclusive language that should not be used.

Diversity

Diversity refers to the wide range of human qualities including, but not limited to; ability, age, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, family dynamics, gender, gender identity, gender expression, language, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation.

The *Unruh Civil Rights Act of 1959* is a piece of California legislation that specifically outlaws discrimination based on sex, race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, age, disability, medical condition, genetic information, marital status, or sexual orientation.

This Guide provides recommended language that reflects the diversity of our communities in an accurate and respectful way.

Why Use Inclusive Language?

Inclusive language positively reflects the richness of the diversity of our community by acknowledging the lifestyles, experiences, and values of a wide variety of people.

The use of inclusive language by Cosumnes CSD staff:

• Promotes feelings of respect, understanding, and equality in the community;

• Contributes to a harmonious, productive, positive, and respectful workplace;

• Demonstrates sensitivity and awareness of staff;

• Positively reflects the richness of the social and cultural diversity of our community.

Development of inclusive language is an evolutionary, collective group process. Although this Guide recommends certain terminology, staff should be aware that inclusive language is a fluid concept and staff should always take into account individual preferences. Staff may need to ask individuals what their preference is, in a respectful manner, as they may not be aware.

Non-Inclusive Language

There are many ways that the use of non-inclusive language can be considered a form of discrimination.

Discrimination is treating people a certain way based on preconceived attitudes and beliefs about a group of people rather than on the merits of the individual person.

Discrimination can be intentional or unintentional, much like the use of non-inclusive language. Again, most people do not want to intentionally discriminate against people; often it is done unintentionally because people are not aware of the effect that their language and actions are having on the other person.

Some of the ways language can be used to express discrimination include derogatory labelling, imposed labelling, stereotyping, undue emphasis on differences, invisibility, discriminatory humor, put-downs, and self-deprecating comments.

Stereotyping

Stereotyping is inaccurate and often derogatory. It prejudges a person's ability, skills, and personality based on unfair assumptions.

Ableism is also a form of stereotyping where people with disabilities are devalued or their potential is perceived to be limited.

Derogatory Labelling

Using language that refers to an individual's gender, sexual identity, culture, ability, or other dimension of diversity in derogatory terms is unacceptable.

Derogatory terms are offensive, belittling, critical, and insulting. Derogatory labelling sets a targeted group of people apart based on unfair assumptions. Use of derogatory words shows ignorance and insensitivity. Examples of derogatory labelling: homo, colored, Paki, retarded.

Undue Emphasis on Difference

Personal characteristics of people, such as a gender, sexual identity, marital status, family status, ethnicity, or age are often identified even when they are unnecessary or irrelevant.

Personal characteristics of the majority are seldom mentioned, whereas characteristics of marginalized groups are frequently stressed. **Undue emphasis** on difference establishes a certain group as the norm against which all other groups are measured.

It is generally not appropriate to refer to personal or physical characteristics, disabilities, or illnesses of a person or a group unless there is a valid reason for doing so.

Examples of inappropriate expressions that place an undue emphasis on difference:

• Meet our new lifeguard – she's Aboriginal.

• She's a black engineer.

• Let me introduce you to our young, male secretary.

It is important to be aware that these behaviors may be subconscious, but staff must consciously make decisions that are inclusive.

Practical Examples of Inclusive Language

This section will present guidelines to using inclusive language, including examples of inclusive language that Cosumnes CSD staff should use and discriminatory language that staff should avoid.
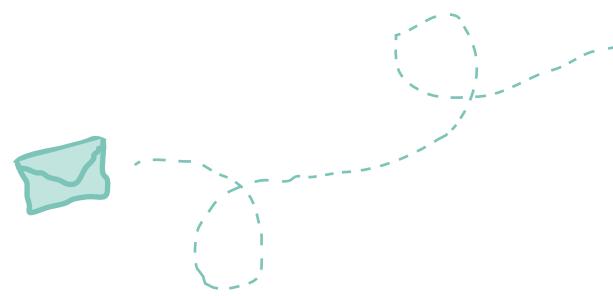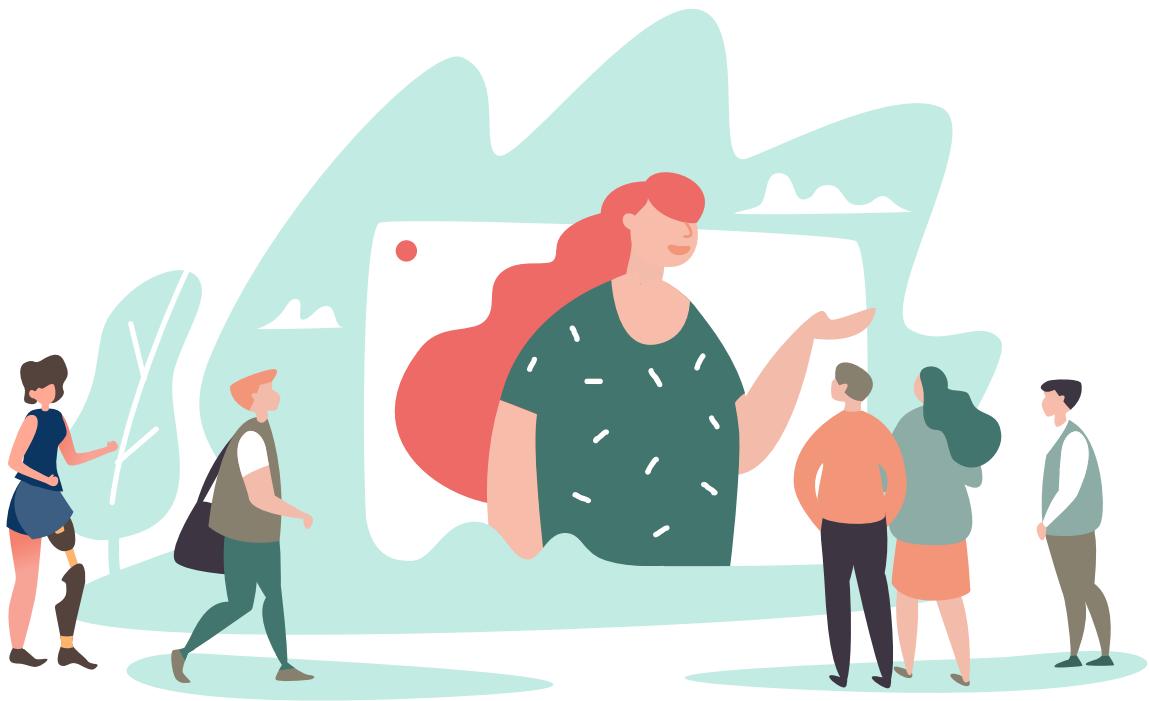
Inclusive Language and Gender

Language may portray women as being invisible, subordinate or dependent on others. **Inclusive language** in relation to gender avoids creating false assumptions about the nature and role of men and women in society by removing ambiguities and false assumptions, and increasing clarity and accuracy.

Job and Position Titles

Forms of address and occupational descriptions should identify the positions or the role held by an individual rather than the gender of the person. Words that portray 'masculine' and 'feminine' characteristics are not always appropriate.

Stereotypical Generalizations

Avoid the use of stereotypical generalizations about the character and behavior of men and women.

• Example: You're behaving like such a girl. Revised: Your behavior is… (Specifically describe the behavior).

Preferred Terms	Terms to Avoid
Chair, Chairperson	Chairman, Chairwoman
Foreperson	Foreman
Workforce, Staff	Manpower
Firefighter	Fireman
Humans, people	Mankind
We need someone to staff the desk	We need someone to man the desk
The best [person or candidate] for the job	The best man for the job
Staff hours, work hours	Man hours

Inclusive Language and Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Language used in everyday social conversations that make reference to families or personal relationships tend to be based on the assumption that everyone is heterosexual.

Language that depicts all relationships as heterosexual denies the complexity of relationships, families and ways in which various sexualities are lived in our community.

Appropriate and inclusive language uses terms that include a range of possibilities in relationships and families. Unless you know the individual, it is important to not assume that you know someone's sexual identity and/or the gender of one's romantic/sexual interests.

Some examples of Inclusive Language:

• "Will you be attending the party with your partner?" is more inclusive and addresses a range of possibilities, rather than asking "Will you be attending the party with your husband?"

• "Partners are welcome too" is more inclusive and accepts the possibility of relationships other than a heterosexual marriage, rather than "Husbands and wives are welcome too."

People of all nationalities, races, ethnicities, and cultural affiliations are represented in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) populations.

For LGBTQ persons who also identify with and belong to other ethnic/racial groups, the stigmatization and discrimination they experience can be compounded.

For these individuals, it may be comforting to find a group that is more accepting and that shares a common cultural identity.

It is important to remember that culture affects our experience, how we think and act, how we relate to others, how we respond to our environments, and what we believe.

Racial and ethnic slurs and labels set groups apart from one another and create and maintain tensions between groups. Slang terms for particular groups may also be considered offensive.

Inclusive Language and Ability

It is important to recognize that not all disabilities are visible or readily observable. Therefore, it is best to use inclusive language all the time.

Discriminatory language in relation to the portrayal of people with disabilities is characterized by **derogatory labelling**, by depersonalizing, by emphasizing the disability rather than the person, and by stereotyping.

If it is necessary or desirable to be more specific about the type of disability involved, the same strategy is recommended - that is, not to focus entirely on the person's disability in the description. Do not put the disability first and the person second.

The term 'handicapped', originated from a 17th century game, in which it meant "put at a disadvantage".

In the 19th century the term became common to mean "equalization" in many different areas other than sports. Although the term 'handicapped' may still be used today, it is considered offensive and should not be used. "A person with a disability," or "persons with a disability" are acceptable. However, it is best to not put undue emphasis on the difference, and simply use "person".

Similarly, to other groups, people with disabilities are rejecting the language that has been created for them by the majority.

Through collective efforts, people with disabilities are developing positive, self-affirming language to define their identities.

Avoid the stereotype of portraying people with a disability as weak, helpless people who deserve our sympathy. These terms dehumanize the person, emphasize powerlessness, and are patronizing.

Inclusive Language and Ability *(continued)*

For example, a person who uses a wheelchair is not confined to a wheelchair, but sees the wheelchair as an aid to mobility and independence.

Some guidelines for inclusive language and disability:

• Examine your own attitudes towards people with disabilities.

• Always remember to put the person first, and the disability second.

• Remember that a disability does not define who the person is.

• Do not focus on the disability unless it is relevant to the situation. This does not mean that a person's disability should be ignored, hidden, or seen as irrelevant. This means that the disability should not be the focus of description except when the topic is related to the disability.

• Do not imply that people with a disability are to be feared, pitied, or ignored. Also do not imply that people with a disability are somehow more heroic, courageous, special, or patient than others.

• Do not make assumptions about what people can and cannot do based on their disability. Individuals with a disability, like those without a disability, have a wide range of interests, skills and qualities.

• Do not define people by their diagnosis.

An issue that regularly arises and contributes to the stigma and exclusion of persons with a mental health condition or illness is reference to people by their diagnosis. People are more than their diagnosis and shouldn't be defined as such.

Inclusive Language and Culture, Ethnicity and Faith Groups

The United States population is made up of people from different cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds. United States population also includes Aboriginal peoples, or people who are indigenous to America.

Ethnic and racial labels and jokes can portray groups of people as superior or inferior to others. Inclusive language in relation to culture and ethnicity is intended to recognize and present the diversity of United States population in positive ways.

Racial, Ethno-cultural, Language, and Faith Groups will have diverse ways of naming and referring to themselves. It is important that we respect a group's or an individual's preference about how they wish to be addressed.

Racial put-downs and **slurs** are never acceptable and it is important to realize that these change with time. If the listening person perceives the term to be a put down, then it is the listener's preference that takes precedence, not the speaker's preference.

People-first language would indicate that it is better to refer to the "person who is Muslim" rather than "the Muslim", or "the Jewish Community" rather than "the Jews."

The phrase "those people" indicates an 'us versus them' attitude that further divides us and should be avoided.

Generalizations about any community are inappropriate, particularly if they contribute to a negative stereotype about that community.

Tone of Voice and Non-Verbal Inclusive Language

Regardless of the words we choose, our non-verbal communication and tone of voice expresses emotions, opinions, and attitudes. We all need to ensure that we think about how we speak to each other and that our professional tone is one of respect and courtesy, particularly when we are working within a diverse workplace.

It is important to avoid patronizing, condescending, sarcastic, and other inflections that might be misunderstood as being disrespectful.

As a diverse community, we also use different non-verbal communication to express ourselves.

Some people prefer not to shake hands, particularly with people of the opposite gender, as a way of showing respect. Some people will not look someone older directly in the eye as a form of respect.

As people integrate into American society, mannerisms and non-verbal communication may or may not change and adapt. It is important that we do not assume that anyone from a particular cultural group will behave in any fixed way.

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Please note that the Inclusive Language Guide is intended as a working document and items will be regularly reviewed and updated as terms and phrasing may change over time.

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