

Humanizing Language Chart

“Our language is the reflection of ourselves. A language is an exact reflection of the character and growth of its speakers.” – Cesar Chavez

What is Humanizing Language?

Words matter. Language matters. How you refer to people can affect how someone feels about themselves and therefore how someone acts. The use of Humanizing Language is important in the work that we do, professionally and especially academically. Humanizing language is a language that is used to implement words that are degrading and are used to potentially implement an action that is negative. In order to foster a trauma informed community, words matter when describing people who are justice impacted. Terminology used in policies, programs, research and academic publications that are derogatory, stigmatizing and dehumanizing can have a significant impact on health, human services and recidivism.

STIGMATIZING WORDS TO AVOID	PHRASES OR WORDS TO USE INSTEAD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offender / Delinquent • Inmate / Prisoner • Felon • Criminal / Convict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S/he / they is a person with justice involvement • Currently incarcerated • Justice impacted • Person impacted / affected by the justice system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex-offender • Ex-con • Ex-Prisoner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice impacted / Justice involved • Person with prior justice system involvement • Person impacted or affected by the justice system
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parolee • Probationer • Detainee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S/he / they is under judicial supervision • Person on parole • Individual in detention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juvenile Offender • Juvenile Delinquent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S/he / they is a young justice-involved person • Young person with justice system involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sex Offender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person with sex offense conviction(s) • Individual previously convicted of a sex offense
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentally Ill • Retarded • Mental 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S/he / they has a mental health condition • Person with mental health needs • Individual in need of/ currently receiving mental health services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S/he / they is experiencing homelessness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addict • Drug Addict • Substance Abuser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • S/he / they has used substances in the past • S/he / they currently uses substances • Person with a history of substance use

