

# Bias Free Communication

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## Guidance on bias free communication

Bias free communication is person centered inclusive language that avoids words or phrases that exclude, stereotype, or erase individuals or groups of people. The goal is to communicate in a way that makes no assumptions about those receiving communication. This guidance has approaches and examples of inclusive language to promote diversity and inclusivity in the WIC clinic setting. The Minnesota Department of Health WIC Program (MDH WIC) will use neutral language related to [gender-inclusive terms](#), [lactation-inclusive terms](#), and [weight-inclusive terms](#) in materials. ***When working with individuals it is best to use the language and communication that they prefer.***

“Just one kind, smart nonjudgmental, trustworthy person...can make all the difference in the world to a person’s care.” -Dr. Cresta Jones

## Learning resources

Some comprehensive resources to learn more about bias free communication include the [Inclusive Language Guidance](#), created by Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention & Control Division. Additionally, a newly developed [Equity & Inclusive Language Toolkit](#) presented by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) can support efforts if lifting up those communities that may feel left behind.

## Gender-inclusive terms

Gender-inclusive language is language that’s inclusive (or neutral) to all genders. Language plays a central role in the way we all think and feel, so it is important to consider how we use individual words in communication. Using a noun, rather than a pronoun, is one approach to make communication more inclusive. For example, one can refer to “pregnancy and birth stages on the way to becoming a parent” rather than saying “...on the way to becoming a mother.” MN WIC will use the following gender-neutral terms:

Gendered terms	Inclusive language
Husband, wife, boyfriend/girlfriend	Partner, significant other, spouse
Brother, sister	Sibling(s)
Daughter/son	Child, children, child’s name

<b>Gendered terms</b>	<b>Inclusive language</b>
Father/mother	Parent, parent's name
Man/women	Person, individual's name
Ladies/gentlemen	Folks, everyone, you all, friends, team
He/she	They/their

## Lactation-related terms

Everyone who wants to breastfeed, chestfeed, or feed their baby human milk should feel supported in reaching their goals. Never assume the way a lactating individual refers to their body parts. Expanding related lactation terms in WIC shows inclusivity and supports diversity.

Below are acceptable inclusive terminology examples:

<b>Current language</b>	<b>Inclusive language</b>
Breast	Breast or chest
Breastfeeding	Breastfeeding or chestfeeding, Breast/chestfeeding, human milk feeding, lactation, lactating, nursing
Breast milk/expressed breast milk	Human Milk, expressed milk, expressed human milk
Breastfeeding coach/counselor	Lactation counselor
Breast pads	Pads
Breast pump	Pump, electric pump, manual pump
Maternity/paternity leave	Parent or family leave

## Lactation/gender-inclusive resources

Education/Training	Resource link
Webinars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Webinar: Chestfeeding 101: An Overview of Lactation Concerns for Transmasculine and Non-Binary People</a>. LA Best Babies Network (LABBN).</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Supporting and Promoting Breastfeeding, Chestfeeding and Lactation in Health Care Settings</a>. University of Albany, State University of New York.</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Inclusive Lactation Support for LGBTQ+ Families</a>. North Carolina Department of Health &amp; Human Services.</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Polling Spotlight: Understanding the Experience of LGBTQ+ Birthing People</a>. Wayside Recovery Center.</li> </ul>
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">June is Pride Month</a>. LGBTQIA+ Resources and Pride Month. United States Breastfeeding Committee.</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Inclusive Lactation Support for LGBTQ+ Families” Presentation Resource List</a> North Carolina Department of Health &amp; Human Services/WIC</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Inclusive Communication Surrounding Childbirth, Lactation, and Infant Feeding</a> AAP Breastfeeding Curriculum, 2021</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Transgender/transsexual/genderfluid Tip Sheet</a> (PDF) – General Information Prepared by Trevor MacDonald. La Leche League Canada.</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Clinical Lactation Support for LGBTQI2S Families</a>. Anna Brauch. Lecture presented: Minnesota Breastfeeding Coalition 2018 Workshop.</li> </ul>
Research and position papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine Position States and Guideline: Infant Feeding and Lactation Related Language and Gender</a>. Breastfeeding Medicine. Aug 2021. 587-590.</li> <li>○ Duckett LJ &amp; Ruud M. (2019). <a href="#">Affirming Language Use When Providing Health Care for and Writing About Childbearing Families Who Identify as LGBTQI+</a>. Journal of Human Lactation, 35(2):227-232.</li> <li>○ Rasmussen, K. M., Felice, J. P., O'Sullivan, E. J., Garner, C. D., &amp; Geraghty, S. R. (2017). <a href="#">The Meaning of "Breastfeeding" Is Changing and So Must Our Language About It</a>. Breastfeeding medicine, 12(9), 510–514.</li> <li>○ Farrow, A. <a href="#">Lactation Support and the LGBTQI Community</a>. Journal of Human Lactation. 2015;31(1):26-28</li> <li>○ MacDonald, T., Noel-Weiss, J., West, D. <i>et al.</i> <a href="#">Transmasculine individuals’ experiences with lactation, chestfeeding, and gender identity: a qualitative study</a>. BMC Pregnancy Childbirth 16, 106 (2016).</li> </ul>

Education/Training	Resource link
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lee, R. <a href="#">Queering Lactation: Contributions of Queer Theory to Lactation Support for LGBTQIA2S+ Individuals and Families</a>. Journal of Human Lactation. 2019;35(2):233-238.</li> </ul>

## Weight-inclusive terms

Inclusive language regarding body size creates a welcoming space for all participants. In recent years there has been increased research and discussion regarding weight-inclusive practices. MN WIC along with other organizations like the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and [wichealth.org](http://wichealth.org) are reviewing and creating communications that honor body diversity while fostering healthy habits. Clinical terms and body descriptors can be triggering or shaming to some participants. Weight-inclusive communication puts less focus on weight-centered discussion and focuses on the full nutrition assessment and includes other health indicators. This allows for individualized services that provide evidence-based education and values health-promoting habits for participants.

MN WIC encourages this language in trainings to support weight-inclusivity and provides local agencies resources to enhance their knowledge and interactions in this area. The [WIC weight inclusive approach](#) includes education materials like nutrition education cards and various trainings. Implication for nutrition services can be found in [risk criteria](#) for weight-related conditions. These tools when used can help reduce barriers in discussing body weight with participants.

Below are examples of inclusive terms used in materials that focus on personalized nutrition assessment, education, and trainings to support weight-inclusivity:

Rather than labeling...	Try this when working with families to describe growth...
Body size descriptors (e.g., stocky, chunky, skinny, scrawny, “little peanut,” etc.)	Higher/lower weight Larger/smaller body
The condition: obese, overweight, normal weight, underweight on growth grid	Use facts; be clear about what you are seeing; be explicit about health concerns (if any); avoid use of language that implies blame. “Let’s look at your child’s growth pattern; how do you feel your child is growing?”
Obese/overweight child	Child with higher weight
Underweight child	Child with lower weight

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Rather than labeling...	Try this when working with families to describe growth...
High/low maternal weight gain	How do you feel your pregnancy is progressing so far? How is your appetite? What are meal patterns? What concerns do you have about access to food?
You should gain 11-25 pounds during your pregnancy	Based on your pre-pregnancy weight, guidelines suggest gaining about 11-25 lbs. during your pregnancy; what are your thoughts?

## Resources that support weight inclusivity

Resource	Resource link
Webinars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Baby Behavior Training for WIC Employees</a> Minnesota Department of Health, WIC program_(MDH WIC). Focus on hunger and satiety. Responsive feeding and parenting.</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Discussing Weight- August 2016</a> Effective and ineffective discussion of growth charts. Tips and strategies for discussing weight. Skills include: recognizing/reflecting resistance and shifting focus to healthy lifestyles.</li> </ul>
Style guide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">The Language of Health: An Editorial Style Guide to Effectively Communicate to the Public.</a> Arizona State Nutrition Action Committee.</li> <li>○ <a href="#">Preferred Language for Weight-Inclusive Conversations with Youth and Their Families*</a> Professional Diabetes.org</li> </ul>
Nutrition implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">101 Underweight (Women)</a> includes <i>Implications for Minnesota WIC Nutrition Services.</i></li> <li>○ <a href="#">113 Obese (Children 2-5 Years of Age)</a> includes <i>Implications for Minnesota WIC Nutrition Services.</i></li> <li>○ <a href="#">115 High Weight-for Length (Infants and Children &lt;24 Months of Age)</a> includes <i>USDA Implications for WIC Nutrition Services.</i></li> <li>○ <a href="#">131 Low Maternal Weight Gain</a> includes <i>USDA Implications for WIC Nutrition Services.</i></li> <li>○ <a href="#">133 High Maternal Weight Gain</a> includes <i>Implications for Minnesota WIC Nutrition Services.</i></li> <li>○ <a href="#">135 Slowed/Faltering Growth Pattern</a> includes <i>USDA Implications for WIC Nutrition Services.</i></li> </ul>
Nutrition education cards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">WIC Nutrition and Your Family</a> MDH WIC</li> </ul>

Resource	Resource link
Manual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">Anthropometrics Manual</a> MDH WIC</li> </ul>
Staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <a href="#">WIC Weight Inclusive Approach</a> MDH WIC</li> <li>○ <a href="#">WIC Baby Behaviors</a> MDH WIC</li> </ul>

## Reference – complete listing of hyperlinks:

### [Inclusive Language Guidance](#)

([fyidocs.web.health.state.mn.us/communications/inclusiveguide.pdf](https://fyidocs.web.health.state.mn.us/communications/inclusiveguide.pdf))

[Equity & Inclusive Language Toolkit](https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/BPHP-Toolkit.pdf) ([www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/BPHP-Toolkit.pdf](https://www.naccho.org/uploads/downloadable-resources/BPHP-Toolkit.pdf))

[Webinar: Chestfeeding 101: An Overview of Lactation Concerns for Transmasculine and Non-Binary People](https://welcomebaby.labestbabies.org/webinar-chestfeeding-101-an-overview-of-lactation-concerns-for-transmasculine-and-non-binary-people/) ([welcomebaby.labestbabies.org/webinar-chestfeeding-101-an-overview-of-lactation-concerns-for-transmasculine-and-non-binary-people/](https://welcomebaby.labestbabies.org/webinar-chestfeeding-101-an-overview-of-lactation-concerns-for-transmasculine-and-non-binary-people/))

[Supporting and Promoting Breastfeeding, Chestfeeding and Lactation in Health Care Settings](https://www.albany.edu/cphce/supporting-and-promoting-breastfeeding-chestfeeding-and-lactation-health-care-settings) ([www.albany.edu/cphce/supporting-and-promoting-breastfeeding-chestfeeding-and-lactation-health-care-settings](https://www.albany.edu/cphce/supporting-and-promoting-breastfeeding-chestfeeding-and-lactation-health-care-settings))

### [Inclusive Lactation Support for LGBTQ+ Families](#)

([www.zoomgov.com/rec/play/tDX5esN24la4HsHzSXnXJ7YullZBbdzJtjZjgtw8d1\\_e9kLUkKlc0rIYpjyrSti86RwS7U8M5k9xvGxD.b1hXnG3QK\\_Reyos?continueMode=true](https://www.zoomgov.com/rec/play/tDX5esN24la4HsHzSXnXJ7YullZBbdzJtjZjgtw8d1_e9kLUkKlc0rIYpjyrSti86RwS7U8M5k9xvGxD.b1hXnG3QK_Reyos?continueMode=true))

### [Polling Spotlight: Understanding the Experience of LGBTQ+ Birthing People](#)

([www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0avPj4NN0k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0avPj4NN0k))

[June is Pride Month](https://www.usbreastfeeding.org/lgbtqia-resources-and-pride-month.html) ([www.usbreastfeeding.org/lgbtqia-resources-and-pride-month.html](https://www.usbreastfeeding.org/lgbtqia-resources-and-pride-month.html))

### [Inclusive Lactation Support for LGBTQ+ Families” Presentation Resource List](#)

([wicws.dph.ncdhhs.gov/provpart/docs/InclusiveLactationSupport-for-LGBTQ-resource%20list.pdf](https://wicws.dph.ncdhhs.gov/provpart/docs/InclusiveLactationSupport-for-LGBTQ-resource%20list.pdf))

### [Inclusive Communication Surrounding Childbirth, Lactation, and Infant Feeding](#)

([downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/Gendered%20terms%20in%20childbirth.pdf](https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/Gendered%20terms%20in%20childbirth.pdf))

[Transgender/transsexual/genderfluid Tip Sheet](https://ubccpd.ca/media/2071/download) ([ubccpd.ca/media/2071/download](https://ubccpd.ca/media/2071/download))

[Clinical Lactation Support for LGBTQI2S Families](https://mnbfc.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/clinical-lactation-support-for-lgbtqi-families-abrauch-abc-ws-2018.pdf) ([mnbfc.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/clinical-lactation-support-for-lgbtqi-families-abrauch-abc-ws-2018.pdf](https://mnbfc.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/clinical-lactation-support-for-lgbtqi-families-abrauch-abc-ws-2018.pdf))

### [Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine Position States and Guideline: Infant Feeding and Lactation Related Language and Gender](#)

([www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/bfm.2021.29188.abm?url\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr\\_id=ori:rid:crossref.org&rfr\\_dat=cr\\_pub%20%20pubmed](https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/bfm.2021.29188.abm?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori:rid:crossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%20%20pubmed))

[Affirming Language Use When Providing Health Care for and Writing About Childbearing Families Who Identify as LGBTQI+](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0890334419830985?journalCode=jhla)

(journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0890334419830985?journalCode=jhla)

[The Meaning of "Breastfeeding" Is Changing and So Must Our Language About It](http://www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/bfm.2017.0073)

(www.liebertpub.com/doi/10.1089/bfm.2017.0073)

[Lactation Support and the LGBTQI Community](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0890334414554928?journalCode=jhla)

(journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0890334414554928?journalCode=jhla)

[Transmasculine individuals' experiences with lactation, chestfeeding, and gender identity: a qualitative study](https://bmcpregnancychildbirth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12884-016-0907-y#citeas) (bmcpregnancychildbirth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12884-016-0907-y#citeas)

[Queering Lactation: Contributions of Queer Theory to Lactation Support for LGBTQIA2S+ Individuals and Families](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0890334419830992) (journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0890334419830992)

wichealth.org (www.wichealth.org/)

[WIC weight inclusive approach](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/wtinclusive.html)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/wtinclusive.html)

[WIC risk criteria](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/index.html) (www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/index.html)

[Baby Behavior Training for WIC Employees](http://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/bb/guide.pdf)

(www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/bb/guide.pdf)

[Discussing Weight- August 2016](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/webinars/index.html#aug2016)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/pcs/skills/webinars/index.html#aug2016)

[The Language of Health: An Editorial Style Guide to Effectively Communicate to the Public](http://www.azhealthzone.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/style-guide-language-of-health.pdf)

(www.azhealthzone.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/style-guide-language-of-health.pdf)

[Preferred Language for Weight-Inclusive Conversations with Youth and Their Families\\*](http://professional.diabetes.org/sites/default/files/media/preferred_language_for_weight.pdf)

(professional.diabetes.org/sites/default/files/media/preferred\_language\_for\_weight.pdf)

[101 Underweight \(Women\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/101.html)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/101.html)

[113 Obese \(Children 2-5 Years of Age\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/113.html)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/113.html)

[115 High Weight-for Length \(Infants and Children <24 Months of Age\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/115.html)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/115.html)

[131 Low Maternal Weight Gain](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/131.html)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/131.html)

[133 High Maternal Weight Gain](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/133.html)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/133.html)

[135 Slowed/Faltering Growth Pattern](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/135.html)

(www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/riskcodes/135.html)

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[WIC Nutrition and Your Family](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/nutrition/tips.html) ([www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/nutrition/tips.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/nutrition/tips.html))

[Anthropometrics Manual](http://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/nutrition/nst/anthro.pdf)

([www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/nutrition/nst/anthro.pdf](http://www.health.state.mn.us/docs/people/wic/localagency/training/nutrition/nst/anthro.pdf))

[WIC Baby Behaviors](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/bb.html) ([www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/bb.html](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/wic/localagency/training/bb.html))

*Minnesota Department of Health - WIC Program, 625 Robert St N, PO BOX 64975, ST PAUL MN 55164-0975; 1-800-657-3942, [health.wic@state.mn.us](mailto:health.wic@state.mn.us), [www.health.state.mn.us](http://www.health.state.mn.us); to obtain this information in a different format, call: 1-800-657-3942.*

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