

ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE GLOSSARY

GLOSARIO DE LENGUAJE ALTERNATIVO

RMIAN asks each of its partners, including staff and volunteers, to use language intentionally and to consider whether the language we use recognizes the humanity of every person and expresses the inherent value in all people, in all situations. This document is meant to aid all of us in that self-reflection and is not intended as a tool to police others' language use. Everyone is encouraged to use this document as a starting point for reflection and research.

Below are some examples of terminology that has been identified as harmful, problematic, or worthy of considering alternatives, along with examples of go-to language that may be better. Sometimes the terms replaced might still be appropriate in certain contexts. Moreover, members of a particular community should feel comfortable using the language they are comfortable with, even if that same language may not be suitable for use by people who are not members of the group (these are sometimes referred to as “in-group” terms). In-group terms are often an act of resilience and re-appropriation and may carry different meanings to different people. **If we are unsure what language to use in identifying someone, that person is the best source. Always listen for and respect a person's self-identified terminology.**

Sometimes, the direct translation of terms does not result in using terms that carry the same meaning in a different language, and this can result in inadvertent misuse of language, or use of terms that carry a harmful meaning. If this is a concern, research can help. Please see [insert link to resources guide].

Finally, this is a living document that is meant to be open for additions and comments. Engagement with this document and feedback generated is greatly appreciated. To suggest an addition or consideration of a change, please use [this form](#). Suggestions will be reviewed quarterly.

As a general rule, if you have questions about how to refer to your client or colleague, just ask them! For more ideas on additional flip suggestions, see RMIAN's Alternative Language Glossary. Please also engage with the resource list to continue learning how to use language as a means for empowerment and respect.

TERMS USED IN THE IMMIGRATION SYSTEM TERMINOS USADOS EN EL SISTEMA MIGRATORIO	
Terminology that can be harmful based on context: Lenguaje deshumanizante o insultos que evitar:	Consider using: Considera usar:
Alien, Alienígena	Non-citizen, No ciudadano Person/people, persona, gente
Alien number/A-number, Número A	Case number, File number, ID number. Número de caso, Número del archivo, Número ID
Respondent/Applicant, demandado/a/e/ solicitante	Client's name, nombre de cliente
Arriving Alien, Alienígena Llegando	Arriving Person/Noncitizen/Individual/human, Persona/humano/gente/migrante recién Llegada Person designated as arriving, Persona designada como recién Llegada

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TERMS USED IN THE IMMIGRATION SYSTEM TERMINOS USADOS EN EL SISTEMA MIGRATORIO

Terminology that can be harmful based on context:
Lenguaje deshumanizante o insultos que evitar:

Consider using:
Considera usar:

Rider, Pasajero

Minor Respondent, Encuestado/a/e menor
Child's name, Nombre de niño/a/e

if applicable:
Minor Respondent included in the application
or
[Child's Name], who is included in the application

"Case" when referencing a client,
"Caso" en referencia a un cliente

Client, Cliente

Ex: She was my first case at RMIAN.
Ej: Ella fue mi primer caso en RMIAN.

Ex: She was my first client at RMIAN.
Ej: Ella fue mi primer cliente en RMIAN.

Detainee, Detenidx

Person detained, Persona detenidx

Illegal, Ilegal
Illegal Immigrant, inmigrante ilegal

Person living in the U.S. without documentation; Persona viviendo en EEUU sin documentación
Undocumented American, Americano indocumentado

Illegal v Legal Immigration System,
Sistema migratorio legal e ilegal

Immigration system, Sistema migratorio

Model citizen, worthy immigrant, or other terms that indicate someone is "good" because they conform with White U.S. culture, are not "criminal" or one of the "bad" immigrants.

Buen ciudadano, inmigrante valiosx, u otros frases que indican que alguien es "buenx" por conformar con cultura Blanco de los US, que no son "criminales," o que no son "inmigrantes malx."

**Note: While these descriptions may seem positive, they uphold racist and xenophobic narratives that harm Black, immigrant, and other groups of people who are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement, child welfare, and other systems.*

**Nota: Mientras esto puede parecer positivo, defiende narrativas racistas y xenófobas que mantienen a los negros, los inmigrantes y otros grupos de personas que son desproporcionadamente atacados por las fuerzas del orden, el bienestar infantil y otros sistemas.*

Give specific examples of what they have done and who they are.

Provee ejemplos específicos de lo que hicieron y quienes son.

Ex., Ms. Garcia raised 6 children on her own and paid her taxes for 5 years.

Ej., Sra. Garcia crió sus 6 niños sola y pagó sus impuestos por 5 años.



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TERMS USED IN THE IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

TERMINOS USADOS EN EL SISTEMA MIGRATORIO

Terminology that can be harmful based on context: <i>Lenguaje deshumanizante o insultos que evitar:</i>	Consider using: <i>Considera usar:</i>
Victim, Victima	Survivor, Sobreviviente *Note: Use client's preferred language *Nota: Use el idioma preferido del cliente
Alleged Victim, Presunta victima	Complaining Witness, Testigo Demandante
Criminal Justice System, Sistema de Justicia Criminal *Note: While the term may appear benign, it implies that the system is inherently just and discounts the experiences of many people for whom justice in the system has been illusory.	Criminal Legal System, Sistema Criminal Legal
Detainee, Detenidx	Person detained, Persona detenidx
Felon, Felon	Person convicted of a felony, Persona condenado por una felonía
Criminal, Criminal, delincuente	Person convicted of a crime, Persona condenada por un delito
Ex-convict, Ex-convicto	Person's name, Nombre de la persona
Defendant, Demandado/ Acusado/a/e	

TERMS USED WHEN SPEAKING ABOUT DRUG USE

TERMINOS QUE USAR AL HABLAR DEL USO DE DROGAS

Terminology that can be harmful based on context: <i>Lenguaje deshumanizante o insultos que evitar:</i>	Consider using: <i>Considera usar:</i>
Addict, Adicto Junkie/ Druggie, drogadicto, Drug abuser, abusador de drogas	Person with a substance use disorder (only if diagnosed), Persona que tiene un trastorno por consumo de sustancias (sólo si ha sido diagnosticada) Person who uses drugs, Persona que usa drogas
Ex-addict, ex-adicto Clean/Dirty, limpio/sucio	Person in recovery, Persona en recuperación Abstained, abstencion Ex: "She has abstained from drugs for 1 ½ years.", Ej. "Ella se ha abstenido de las drogas durante un año y medio"
Suffering from addiction, Sufriendo de adicción	Person with an addiction or substance use disorder, Persona viviendo con una adicción o desorden del uso de sustancias
Relapse, recaída	Reinitiating use, Reinicio del uso

ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE GLOSSARY

GLOSARIO DE LENGUAJE ALTERNATIVO

TERMS DESCRIBING MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES

TERMINOS QUE USAR AL HABLAR SOBRE LA SALUD MENTAL

In general, words and phrases that are clinical diagnoses should not be used informally to describe behavior. Instead, consider using language that accurately describes the behavior.

Mental Health Diagnoses Commonly Used Colloquially	Alternative Descriptors
Bipolar, Bipolar Crazy, Insane, nuts, loco, demente Maniac, Maniaco Mental (meaning Intense), mental OCD, ocd Psychotic, Psicótico Psycho, Psicopata Sociopath, Sociopata	Erratic, Manic and depressive emotions, High and low swings, Back and forth, Disorganized, Unstable Erraticx, emociones de mania y depresion, cambios de emocion altos y bajos, De ida y vuelta, Desorganizado, Inestable Intense, Wild, Overwhelming, Impulsive, Energized, Intenso, Abrumador, Impulsivx, Energizadx Awesome, Fascinating, Wicked, Extreme, Impresionante, Fascinante, Traviesa, Extremo Meticulous, Neat, Picky, Perfectionist, Meticulosa, Ordenada, Exigente, Perfeccionista Consider Instead: wild, confusing, unpredictable, has inability to distinguish between right and wrong, doesn't respect feelings and emotions of others, uses deception, seeming callousness, difficulty recognizing emotion, acts for personal gain w/o regard to impact on others, arrogance; Violating the rights of others through dishonest actions; Impulsiveness; Risk-taking; Difficulty appreciating the negative aspects of their behavior. Considere en cambio: confus, impredecible, tiene incapacidad para distinguir la correcto y lo incorrecto, no respecta los sentimientos y emociones de los demas, usa el engaño, aparente, insensibilidad, dificultad de reconocer las emociones, actúa para beneficio personal sin tener en cuenta el impacto a los demas; arrogancia; violar los derechos de otros a traves de acciones deshonestas; impulsividad; asuncion de riesgos; dificultad para apreciar los aspectos negativos de su comportamiento



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TERMS DESCRIBING MENTAL HEALTH DIAGNOSES

TERMINOS QUE USAR AL HABLAR SOBRE LA SALUD MENTAL

When discussing diagnosed conditions, avoid labeling the person who experiences these conditions.

Mental Health Diagnoses Commonly Used Colloquially	Alternative Descriptors
Is [mental health condition or symptoms as adjective] Ex. Is psychotic, schizophrenic, bipolar, delusional, Es [condición de salud mental o síntomas como adjetivo], Ej. Es psicótico, esquizofrenia, bipolar, delirante	Has, experiences, or is living with [mental health condition or symptoms] Ex. Has schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, psychosis, delusions, etc., Tiene o está viviendo con [condición o síntomas de salud mental]. Ej. Tiene esquizofrenia, trastorno bipolar, psicosis, delirios, etc.
Mentally ill, Enfermo mental	Person with a mental illness, Persona con una enfermedad mental/ trastorno mental o psicológico Person with an intellectual, developmental, or psychiatric disability
Medication is a crutch, medicación es una muleta	Medication is a treatment tool, le medicación es una herramienta de tratamiento
Psychotic, Psicótico, Psycho, Psicopata Sociopath, Sociopata	(Psychosis) Has psychosis or experiences psychotic symptoms, Psicosis: tiene psicosis o sintoma psicótico
Mental retardation, Retraso mental	Intellectually disabled, Developmentally disabled, Discapacidad intelectual, Discapacitado del desarrollo
Retarded, Retardado	Person with an intellectual or developmental disability, person with intellectual or developmental differences, person who learns differently
	Anxious, Ansioso
	Uninformed, Ignorant, Desinformada, Ignorante
Spaz/Spastic, Espastico	Clumsy, Forgetful, Impulsive, Reckless, Torpe, Olvidadiza, Impulsiva, Imprudente
Suffers from [particular or general health condition], Sufra de [condición de salud particular o general]	Has, Tiene Has a diagnosis of [particular or general mental health condition], Tiene un diagnosis de [condición de salud particular o general]
Stricken with, Afligido con	Experiences [particular or general mental health condition], Experiencias [condición de salud particular o general]
	Lives with [particular or general mental health condition], Vive con [condición de salud particular o general]
	Working to recover from, Trabajando para recuperarse de

ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE GLOSSARY

GLOSARIO DE LENGUAJE ALTERNATIVO

TERMS DESCRIBING PHYSICAL HEALTH

TERMINOS QUE USAR AL HABLAR DE LA SALUD FISICA

As with mental health diagnoses, in general, words and phrases that are clinical diagnoses should not be used informally to describe behavior. Instead, consider using language that accurately describes the behavior. Also similarly, we should avoid labeling people with physical health diagnoses by their diagnosis.

Common Labeling Language	Alternative Descriptors
Able-bodied, Sin discapacidad Normal, Normal	Person without disability, No discapacitado, Persona sin discapacidad
Disabled, incapacitado	Person/people with/without disability, persona con/sin discapacidad *Note: You can also name the specific disability instead or use the preferred language of your client. *Nota: También puede nombrar la discapacidad específica o utilizar el idioma preferido de su cliente.
Blind, ciego	Blind, if cannot see Ciego, si no puede ver Low-vision (if can see, but limited) Baja visión (si puede ver, pero limitada)
Deaf, Deaf-Mute, sordo, sordo-mudo	Deaf, if cannot hear; sordo, si no puede oír Hard of hearing (if have ability to hear but limited), dificultad para oír (si tiene la capacidad de oír pero limitada)
Mute, mudo	Non-verbal, no verbal Non-speaking, sin hablar
Midget, Enana	Little Person, pequeña persona Short Stature, baja estatura *Note: use client's preferred word *Nota: Use la palabra preferida del cliente
Wheelchair-bound, en silla de ruedas or restricted to, confined to wheelchair, restringido o confinado a silla de ruedas Handicapped, Minusvalido	Person who uses a wheelchair, persona que usa una silla de rueda Person with a disability, Persona con discapacidad, Persona Discapacitada
Obese, Obeso Overweight, Exceso de peso *Note: In general, avoid description or discussion of body size or characteristics unless it is necessary for the work. Move forward into determining the right words to use only after determining the description is necessary. Use the client's preferred word if necessary.	People in larger bodies, personas en cuerpos más grandes Higher-weight people, personas de mayor peso Larger people, gente más grande Fat (when used as a neutral description and if preferred by client), gordo (cuando se utiliza como descripción neutral y es la palabra preferida del cliente) *Nota: Use la palabra preferida del cliente



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LGBTQIA TERMS

TÉRMINOS LGBTQIA

Terminology that can be harmful based on context:

Lenguaje deshumanizante o insultos que evitar:

Client is LGBTQIA, Cliente es LGBTQIA

Homosexual, Homosexual

Transvestite, He/She, etc,
Transvestido, travestí, ect.

Note: In other languages (like Spanish) these words may not carry the same meaning as they do in English.

Sexual preference, Preferencia sexual

Preferred/chosen pronoun*,
pronombre preferido/elegido

*Note: Using either word suggests that gender identity is a preference or a choice when it is neither.

*Nota: Usar cualquiera de las dos palabras sugiere que la identidad de genero es una preferencia o una elección, cuando no lo es.

Consider using:

Considera usar:

Client is [the term that actually applies to the client and what they use to describe themselves] i.e. My client is gay/lesbian

Cliente es [los términos/letras que realmente se aplican al cliente y que los que usan para describirse a sí mismos]; ej. Mi cliente es gay/lesbiana.

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc,
gay, lesbiana, bisexual, etc

Trans (or transgender) person, trans woman, trans man, persona trans (o persona transgénero), mujer trans, hombre trans

Sexual orientation, Orientacion sexual

**[Name/Person] uses
she/they/he/zie/sie/ey/ve/tey/e**

[Nombre/Persona] usa ella/ellos/elles, etc
pronombre

*Note: When in doubt, use the person's name.

*Nota: Cuando hay duda, usa el nombre de la persona.



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GLOSARIO DE LENGUAJE ALTERNATIVO

OTHER COMMONLY USED TERMS/ PHRASES

OTROS TERMINOS Y FRASES COMUNES

Terminology that can be harmful based on context:

Lenguaje deshumanizante o insultos que evitar:

Hobo, bum, the homeless (noun)

Master, Owner, Slaveholder, Maestro esclavo, Dueño

*Note: The term "master" is disfavored in relation to things outside of the context of enslavement as well. For example: instead of saying "you are a master lawyer" try, "you are a great lawyer." Or instead of "master copy" try "main/primary copy."

*Nota: El término "maestro" tampoco está favorecido en relación con cosas fuera del contexto de esclavitud. Por ejemplo: en lugar de decir "eres un maestro abogado", trata "eres un gran abogado". O en lugar de "copia maestra", trata "copia principal/primaria".

Slave, esclavo

Bottom of the totem pole, Parte inferior del totem
When used outside of reference to a group or event that refers to itself in this way:

Tribe, Tribu

Pow wow

Indians, Natives, Indios, Nativos

*Note: Where indios is used and interpreted into Indian in English, it may be useful for an advocate to explain (or ask a client to explain) the significance of the word, if it is being used as an epithet, because the translation itself does not necessarily make that clear.

Consider using:

Considera usar:

Person experiencing homelessness, unhoused/unsheltered, person without housing, housing insecure,
Persona sin hogar o vivienda, Vivienda insegura

Those who claimed people as property/people who held others in slavery,
Aquellos que reclamaron a las personas como propiedad/ personas que mantuvieron a otros en esclavitud

Enslaver, Esclavizador

Person who was enslaved, Enslaved person,
Persona que fue esclavizada, persona esclavizada

Least significant, Menos significativo

People/Community, Personas, Comunidad

"Let's have a huddle/meeting", Tengamos una reunion

Indigenous People, First Nations, First Peoples, Pueblos indígenas, Primeras naciones, Primeros pueblos

*Note: Some Indigenous People prefer the term Indian. Please use the individual's preferred term. If you don't know what that is, just ask!

*Nota: Algunas personas indígenas prefieren el término indio. Utilice el término preferido de la persona. Si no sabes qué es eso, ¡pregúntale!



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OTHER COMMONLY USED TERMS/ PHRASES

OTROS TERMINOS Y FRASES COMUNES

**Terminology that can be harmful
based on context:**

Lenguaje deshumanizante o insultos que evitar:

Consider using:

Considera usar:

Spirit Animal, Espiritu Animal

Low Hanging Fruit

**Quick Wins; “high return, low risk”, Triunfos
rapidos; “Alto rendimiento, Bajo riesgo”**

**Note: For more on the genesis of this phrase
and its harm, see [Do Your Colleagues Use the
"Phrase Low Hanging Fruit"?](#)**

Crazy → “That’s so crazy!”

**Wild → “That’s so wild!”; Outrageous,
unbelievable, unreal, ridiculous, absurd**

Que loco → “eso es tan loco!”

**Salvaje → “eso es tan salvaje!”, Escandaloso,
increíble, irreal, ridículo, absurdo**

**Refused → “my client refused to talk with me”
“refused to sign”**

**Declined → “My client declined signing a
consent form.”**

**Rehuso (o Rechazo) → “Mi cliente rehusó hablar
conmigo.” “rehuso firmar”**

**Declino → “Mi cliente declino firmar una
autorización.”**

**Militarized language use: Marshall our forces;
go on the offensive; gather the troops;
intel; rapid fire**

**The militarization of language normalizes the
military as part of everyday life and
overprioritizes the importance of war in
history and politics, among other facets.**



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