



# Changing Language, Changing Minds: Using Restorative Language to Promote Solidarity and Equity

RESTORATIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE

NATIONAL  
INSTITUTE

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## INTRODUCTION



FHI 360 is a nonprofit human development organization dedicated to improving lives in lasting ways by advancing integrated, locally driven solutions in more than 60 countries and all U.S. states. FHI 360 leads the Compass Rose Collaborative, a program that improves the education and employment outcomes of young adults ages 18-24 impacted by the criminal justice system. The collaborative works with partners in communities with high rates of poverty and crime. The program model provides young people with support services; creates lasting community-based partnerships; and documents and promotes effective and promising practices. (The Compass Rose Collaborative is 100% funded by the Department of Labor in the amount of \$4.5 million. No other sources of funding support this program.)

“I believe words make a difference. Let’s replace stigma with respect and stereotypes with seeing the individual.”

If we engage with each other in an intentional way, we will create the positive and equitable atmosphere we all want to see.”

— Lisa Johnson  
Director, National  
Institute for Work and  
Learning

FHI 360 is committed to advancing equity in our work. To do this, we have committed to proactively recognize, understand and be more intentional in our work toward eliminating racial and other inequities that stem from discrimination, oppression and systemic racism. We believe that, in doing this work, the words we use make a difference. To advance equity, we should use language that replaces stigma with respect and stereotypes with unbiased language. **As a catalyst to this needed change in language, FHI 360’s National Institute for Work and Learning (NIWL) has created this Restorative Language Guide.**

Restorative, or humanizing, language removes stereotypes and labels and demonstrates solidarity and support to people and communities. People should not be defined by their mistakes. Humanizing language acknowledges that people are more than their past and have the capacity to change; it reduces stigma, cultivates a sense of self-awareness and acknowledges and prioritizes the individual over their characteristics or behavior.

This guide provides examples of restorative language that NIWL suggests using when describing work with individuals impacted by the criminal justice system and with communities to eradicate inequities. We propose alternative, more humanizing language to commonly used terms.

When working with individuals, it is always advisable to ask how they would like to be identified. In general, however, NIWL is committed to using restorative language with a person-first approach. This is not a set of standards; this document will change as community perspectives and terminology evolve over time.

## RESTORATIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE

	COMMON TERMS	RESTORATIVE LANGUAGE	READ MORE
<b>A</b>	At-risk youth	Youth from under-resourced communities, youth historically underserved	<a href="#">Why It's Wrong to Label Students 'At Risk'</a>
<b>C</b>	Convict	Person or individual convicted of a crime	<a href="#">Words Matter: Using Humanizing Language</a>
	Criminal	Person involved in the criminal justice system	<a href="#">Words Matter: Using Humanizing Language</a>
<b>D</b>	Disconnected youth	Young people between 16 and 24 years of age who are neither in school nor working  Opportunity youth	<a href="#">History of Opportunity Youth</a>
	Dropout	Student who withdrew prior to completing an education or training program	
<b>E</b>	Ex-offender Ex-convict	Person who was incarcerated; person formerly incarcerated  Returning community member	
<b>F</b>	Felon	Person convicted of a crime and sentenced for more than a year	<a href="#">Words Matter: Using Humanizing Language</a>
	Felon-friendly business	Second-chance employer	
<b>H</b>	Handicap	Disability	<a href="#">Guidelines for Writing About People With Disabilities   ADA National Network (adata.org)</a>
	Homeless	Person experiencing housing instability	<a href="#">Housing Instability   Healthy People 2020</a>
<b>I</b>	Illegal alien	Person living in or entering a country without legal permission	<a href="#">Associated Press Stylebook (apstylebook.com)</a>
	Immigrant	Person who comes to live permanently in a foreign country	
	Inmate	Person currently incarcerated	
<b>J</b>	Juvenile delinquent	Young person involved in the justice system	

<b>P</b>	Parolee or probationer	Person on parole/formerly incarcerated  Person on (supervised) probation	
<b>S</b>	Sex offender	Person convicted of a sex offense/offense sexual in nature	<a href="#">ATSA Terminology</a>
<b>V</b>	Victim	Person who had a crime committed against them  Survivor	

## CONCLUSION

We hope that you find this guide helpful in advancing your work to increase equity. FHI 360 works to promote more equitable systems, and we are committed to aligning our language to support the [nurturing, repairing and building that we do through our projects in communities across the United States.](#)

**For more information, email us at [NIWL@fhi360.org](mailto:NIWL@fhi360.org).**