



HIV Stigma Language Guide





Introduction: This guide is intended to update providers, healthcare administrators, navigators and other public health professionals on new terminology surrounding HIV and common phrases heard around the LGBTQIA+ community. Like all forms of language, the terms we use now may change in the future. The work to reduce stigma is on-going. A huge part is simply finding the right balance of scientific and plain language. This is to ensure we are actively working to bridge the gap in understanding. This also serves as an unofficial challenge to remain an active participant and commit to understanding the needs of the community you serve. Overall, if you are unsure of what a term means after reviewing this guide, spark conversation with someone who you trust to have a candid conversation with. If you have any suggestions or wish to submit a request to change/ add terminology, please contact us at Cabria.Ridgnal@dallascounty.org



Golden Rules to reducing your use of stigmatizing language

1. Ask one's preference. A simple way to create an affirming and welcoming environment is to ask what someone prefers, whether it's pronouns, preferred name or using scientific language to describe complex concepts. If you are unsure, establish those boundaries.
2. Always place people first when describing an illness or condition. In terms of HIV/ AIDS always say "person living with HIV"
3. Find a balance between scientific terms and plain language. We hold the responsibility to educate as well as seek understanding. Ensure to gauge audience understanding. Certain developments might not translate well and should be explained. A common critique shared among focus groups is the lack of understanding of complex processes or terms. For example, a patient might not know what a CD4 count is. The proper way to address this is to explain what a CD4 count is and the step a patient would have to go through to obtain this number and finally how this number determines their treatment from here on out.



Basic Definitions

Implicit Bias: is a negative attitude, of which one is not consciously aware, against a specific social group. Implicit bias is thought to be shaped by experience and based on learned associations between qualities and social categories, including race and/or gender.

Stigma: HIV stigma is negative attitudes and beliefs about people living with HIV. It is the prejudice that comes with labeling an individual as part of a group that is believed to be socially unacceptable.

4 Main Types of Stigma

Internalized: feeling shameful, worthless, inferior, or at fault because of HIV status

Enacted: the real experience of discrimination as a result of one's HIV status

Anticipated: the fear of prejudice or discrimination; expecting to be treated badly or to be oppressed

Normative: perceived prevalence of HIV stigma in the community

How the words we say can impact HIV Stigma

As medical professionals there is an unspoken power balance between service providers and those receiving services. This balance is key to patient adherence, and we must recognize how this influence patient decisions. A key component is the way providers communicate with patients. Communication between healthcare providers and patients can perpetuate HIV stigma and create barriers to care. Providers who exhibit negative biases or make insensitive comments about HIV or sexual health practices can reinforce societal stigmas, leading patients to feel ashamed or fearful of seeking treatment. This bias and judgment can also make patients reluctant to disclose important health information resulting in inaccurate treatment plans or less likely to return for follow-up care. Additionally, when providers fail to offer clear, accurate information about HIV prevention, treatment options, and prognosis, patients may remain misinformed and decrease efficacy. Effective, compassionate, and non-judgmental communication is essential to dismantling HIV stigma, overcoming biases, and improving access to care for those living with or at risk of HIV.



Stigmatizing Word or Phrase	What you should say instead	Use it in a sentence please
A drug that prevents HIV infection	PrEP a regimen that prevents HIV transmission	"I've been faithfully adhering to my PrEP regimen, and it's brought me immense peace of mind knowing I'm actively preventing HIV transmission."
AIDS AIDS Test	Stage 3 HIV Tested for HIV	When I was first diagnosed I was close to a stage 3 HIV diagnosis, my CD4 count was right at 200. Now after a year of treatment my CD4 count is around 270. As the public health expert in my friend group I always encourage my friend to make sure they are asking to be tested for HIV during routine STI testing.
Became infected	Diagnosed or Acquired	Although best practices for handling blood products are practiced widely, some reports of patients acquiring HIV through blood transfusions have been reported.



Bodily Fluids	<p>Refer to the four types of fluids that can transmit HIV “transmissible fluids”</p> <p>Blood</p> <p>Semen</p> <p>Breast Milk</p> <p>Vaginal Fluids</p>	<p>I was giving “the talk” to my cousin the other day because she’s getting to that age and she’s like my first born! She seemed to know a lot, I made sure to mention the fluids she needs to be aware of that transmit HIV. She asked me if saliva was on the list. I told her kiss all you want girl just make sure to be cautious of blood, semen, vaginal fluids, and breast milk. I think she’ll be ok, it takes a village to raise a child.</p>
Boy or Girl in a relationship	<p>Present as more masculine or feminine. If traditional gender roles are followed which one aligns more with those roles</p>	<p>I like a more masculine presenting woman. As a more fem presenting woman, I love the look of a rough exterior but a woman who just melts when we’re together.</p>
<p>Catch HIV</p> <p>Contract AIDS</p> <p>To Pass on HIV</p>	<p>To be diagnosed with HIV</p> <p>To acquire HIV</p> <p>To transmit HIV</p>	<p>I have an alarm set for taking all of my vitamins. I just include my Biktaryv with that to reduce chances of transmission. Last thing I want to do is forget right before this party, I’ve had my eye on this fine man for a long time!</p>



Death Sentence, “HIV is not a death sentence anymore.”	chronic health condition, manageable health condition	Back in the 90’s it was very scary, we lost a lot of elders in the community. I’m grateful for the advancement in science that has made HIV a more manageable health condition with proper treatment.
Dirty vs Clean (This can refer a wide variety of things from syringes to speaking about STI results)	Used vs unused Aware of sexual health status vs unaware of status	During my time volunteering at a substance use treatment our program would accept used syringes in exchange for new unused ones.
Dyke*	A derogatory term used to define a lesbian. Some members of the community have reclaimed the term and may describe themselves as such. Do not use the term to describe someone unless you self-identify as one.	
End HIV	End HIV transmission / related deaths / stigma Be specific in what you aim to end as to no offend a PLWH	The ultimate goal is to end HIV transmission by 2030 we must also try our best to end HIV stigma in order to foster a welcoming environment for everyone to be knowledgeable about HIV in general.



Gender vs Sex Vs Sexuality	<p>Gender and gender identity (who you are how you express yourself)</p> <p>Biological sex (anatomy, physical attributes such as external sex organs)</p> <p>Sexual orientation (who you want to be with)</p>	
Hermaphrodite	Intersex- a person born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical understanding of female or male	Medical providers no longer encourage surgeries or other procedures to change the appearance of anatomy in intersex infants; it can result in chronic pain, sterilization, scarring, loss of sensation and incontinence later in life.
HIV or AIDS patient, AIDS or HIV carrier	Person living with HIV (PLWH)	My great uncle inspires me so much because as a person living with HIV he's endured so much from losing loved ones to trying to navigate the world after his diagnosis.
HIV Virus	Just HIV. The word virus is redundant	How well versed are you on the type of bodily fluids that can transmit HIV?
Infect	Acquire, Diagnosed, transmit HIV	The overall likelihood of transmitting HIV is higher after repeated behaviors that lead to exposure.



Injection drug user	Person who uses substances intravenously	The incidence rates of HIV and Hep C are lower this year due to several agencies adopting syringe exchange programs.. Now people who use substances intravenously have better access to unused needles.
Latino/a	Latinx or Latine gender-neutral form of the word Latino, created by LGBTQIA+, gender non-binary, and feminist communities in Spanish speaking countries. The objective of the term Latine is to remove gender from the Spanish word Latino, by replacing it with the gender-neutral Spanish letter E.	In our EMA we've seen that many Latine individuals experience barriers to care that include lack of privacy and transportation which has impacted viral suppression tremendously.
New Case/ New Infection	New diagnosis	We've seen several new diagnoses in the clinic during Pride season. This is partially due to an increased interest in knowing your status.
Promiscuous	Have multiple partners	A part of my relationship includes us having multiple partners. It just works for us but we've talked about healthy boundaries that I



		hope everyone continues to follow.
Rape victim	Survivor of sexual assault	Please join us for our annual candle lit walk to honor both survivors and those who have passed due to sexual assault.
Risky Behaviors	behaviors that increase the chances of transmitting HIV	Sharing needles with people whose status is unknown is a behavior that increases chances of HIV transmission.
Sex change	transition	I changed my name in my early 20's after college, I didn't transition until some years later and it was the best decision I've ever made. I can live in my truth.
STD	<p>Sexually transmitted Infection (STI)</p> <p>We've transitioned to using this term instead because it is all encompassing. Not all STI's are diseases. Diseases usually have signs and symptoms. Think chlamydia or gonorrhea one patient may discomfort and discharge</p>	Testing positive for multiple STI's increase your likelihood of acquiring HIV.



	and test positive while another patient may not have symptoms at all and test positive.	
transgendered	Transgender person Trans Man or Trans Woman	



Terms you may hear from the LGBTQ Community

Term and meaning	Context or sentence
<p>AFAB “assigned female at birth.”</p> <p>AMAB “assigned male at birth.”</p>	<p>Because a patient is AFAB we have to prescribe them with Truvada instead of Descovy because there’s not enough research to support</p>
Ally	(typically) straight and/or cis person who supports members of the LGBT community
Ballroom	
Bear	gay or bisexual men who exhibit physical traits such as being larger, having a hairy body, and facial hair.
BIPOC	-Black Indigenous People of Color
Bottom/ Bottoming	A self-description of someone who typically takes a more receptive or submissive role in sexual activities, often contrasted with "top" or "topping," which denotes a more active or dominant role.
Butch	is a term used in lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities to describe someone who typically express themselves in a more masculine manner, both in appearance and behavior.



Chaser	someone who is primarily attracted to individuals who identify as transgender.
Chop	Being eliminated from a ballroom category. Getting chopped means you will not advance to the next round of that category.
Cisgender	Identifying as the gender that corresponds to the biological sex they were assigned at birth.
Clock	typically this term is used when persons of transgender identity describe people being able to determine their gender at birth based on certain characteristics or traits. -this term can also be used when some says something that others identify with or is a truthful statement
Cunt/y or serving cunt	This term is used as a colloquial expression to denote fierce, confident, and assertive behavior typically associated with feminine strength and empowerment.
Deadname	Original: the name a non-binary or transgender person was given at birth or a name no longer used



Femme or Masc	<p>"Femme" typically describes a gender presentation that conforms to societal ideals of femininity, encompassing traits such as nurturing behaviors and attire traditionally associated with women.</p> <p>"Masc" denotes a presentation aligned with societal norms of masculinity.</p>
Female to Male (FTM) Male to Female (MTF)	<p>These terms are used to describe transgender individuals who are undergoing or have undergone a gender transition.</p>
Gag/ Gagger	<p>A term used to express being stunned, approval, or utter amazement.</p> <p>I GAGGED when I saw Law Roach's outfit on Legendary last night. The 40 inch lace front was the cherry on top!</p>
Gender affirming care	<p>A range of social, psychological, behavioral, and medical interventions that validates one's experiences as a person who does not identify as the gender they were assigned at birth.</p>
HOUSE MOTHER and FATHER	<p>Two leaders of a house who are known and respected in the ball scene. A mother or father of a house takes on a leadership role in providing support, knowledge, and camaraderie to the house's "children."</p>



KIKI-	<p>Original: Kiki refers to the Kiki Scene which were balls that were created as a youth only and more economical version of formal ballroom gatherings. The Kiki scene also collaborates with community based orgs and service providers to provide access to HIV prevention and treatment services.</p> <p><i>A kiki can also be described as a social gathering, usually for the purpose of casually “kicking back,” gossiping, or sharing stories.</i></p>
Kink	<p>Refers to unconventional sexual preferences or practices that deviate from societal norms. It encompasses a wide range of erotic activities, fantasies, and behaviors that can involve role-playing, bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, and other forms of consensual exploration of sexual desires.</p>
Legendary	<p>A prestigious status awarded to participants who consistently excel in competitions and embody the highest standards of performance, style, and presence.</p>
Non-Binary	<p>Original: An umbrella term for people whose gender identity doesn’t exclusively align with the traditional categories of male or female. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of both genders, while others reject them entirely.</p>



Outing	Refers to the act of disclosing someone's sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent whether knowingly or unknowingly.
Passing	If someone is perceived, at a glance, by others as their affirmed gender.
Queen	Refers to a drag queen, a performer who dresses in women's clothing and often exaggerates feminine characteristics for entertainment purposes.
Questioning	Refers to someone exploring or interested in exploring a sexual orientation or gender identity that aligns with something other than cis heterosexual.
Sickening	A term used to describe something or someone that is incredibly impressive, fabulous, or stunning.
Serodiscordant couple-	Mixed status couple (one partner is HIV-positive and the other is HIV-negative).
Sexuality on a spectrum-	The concept that sexual orientation is not fixed or binary but rather exists on a continuum, recognizing that individuals can experience varying degrees of attraction to different genders.



Top/ Topping	A “top” is self-description for someone who typically is more dominant or takes control during sexual interactions.
Tucking	This is when a person with a penis tucks it to create a flatter appearance.
Twink	A young man in the gay community, typically slim with little body hair.
Verse	Short for versatile, referring to someone who enjoys both topping and bottoming in sexual interactions.
Werk	A term used to encourage or commend someone for doing something exceptionally well, often associated with fashion or performance.

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