

Created by
Planned Parenthood of Michigan

HOW TO TALK ABOUT ABORTION:

A Style Guide for Allies



#BansOffOurBodies

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How we talk about abortion matters

We created this guide to give our allies, partners, and colleagues a clear reference to use when drafting talking points, letters to donors, or other communications about abortion.

Why? Because even though we are all well-intentioned — we support access to abortion, we believe in bodily autonomy — we also are all susceptible to using stigmatizing or coded language when we talk about abortion. And that causes harm.

For example, saying, “Abortion is only 3% of what Planned Parenthood does,” implies that there is something bad about providing abortion, and that’s why you must emphasize how little of our total services it comprises.

This is the same issue with using phrases like “safe, legal, and rare.”

We aren’t ashamed to provide abortions

It’s an important part of what we do. It’s safe and legal. We are proud that our patients know and trust us as a provider of high quality reproductive care, including abortion.



General tips:

- Be inclusive.**
- Say abortion.**
- Put people first.**

The way we talk about abortion evolves

In the guide, you may notice phrases marked as “don’t use” that, just a few years ago, were preferred and encouraged. For example, you’ll notice above that we said “high quality reproductive care, including abortion.”

Not just reproductive care; reproductive care, including abortion.

Not abortion care. Just abortion.

As we continue to interrogate our own unconscious biases and internalized stigma, we will apply that to our internal and external communications, too. We are always learning, and we will always be applying what we learn to our work.

And just like we learned in elementary school, there are always exceptions. Please consider us as a resource. We are all in this fight together, and we will all continue to do better when we know better.

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choice

Do not use as shorthand for the debate over access to abortion, and avoid using the labels pro-choice and anti-choice.

When referring to individual pregnant people, “decision” is preferred, e.g., “Her abortion was her decision.”



anti-choice

Do not use. Use an alternative like “anti-abortion,” or “anti-reproductive health” when referring to services beyond abortion.



“pro-life”

Do not use. Use an alternative like “opposed to abortion.”



fetus

The organism that develops from the embryo at the end of about eight weeks after fertilization (10 weeks since a woman’s last menstrual period) and receives nourishment through the placenta.

For an explanation of the stages of pregnancy, visit www.plannedparenthood.org

We prefer to use the synonym “pregnancy” whenever possible instead of “fetus.”

Example: “After discovering at 20 weeks that there was a medical problem with the pregnancy, she decided with her provider to have an abortion.”



conception

Do not use. Imprecise, nonmedical term for the beginning of pregnancy — as opposed to the more specific fertilization or implantation.

viability

Refers, in general usage and very imprecisely, to the ability of a fetus to live outside the uterus. Avoid using.

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Roe v. Wade

January 22, 1973, U.S. Supreme Court decision (410 U.S. 113 (1973)) that recognized for the first time that the constitutional right to privacy “is broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.”

Roe has come to be known as the case that legalized abortion nationwide. At the time the decision was handed down, nearly two-thirds of the states outlawed abortion except to save a woman’s life. Roe rendered these laws unconstitutional, making abortion services safer and more accessible to people throughout the country.

reproductive justice

Reproductive justice is the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent children in safe and sustainable communities, specifically for people of color, indigenous people, queer and trans people, and other populations that have historically been marginalized. The Reproductive Justice movement was started in 1994 by 12 Black women and is rooted in Black feminist theory. Capitalize when referring specifically to the movement and organizations within the movement, and lowercase when referring to the concept of reproductive justice more broadly.

Planned Parenthood is not a reproductive justice organization, and should not claim that label. However, we should give credit to reproductive justice organizations and activists whenever we write about work that they lead, including but not limited to: Black maternal health, making access to abortion equitable, repealing the Hyde amendment, destigmatizing abortion, and addressing systemic racism as the root of inequities in health access and outcomes. E.g., “Planned Parenthood is committed to repealing the discriminatory Hyde amendment, following the leadership of organizations in the Reproductive Justice movement.”

gender-neutral/gender-inclusive

As much as possible, we should strive to be inclusive in our writing. This includes writing about sexual and reproductive health in a way that does not exclude people who are not women. For example:

- **Gendered:** The unfortunate reality is that too many women in the U.S. face barriers to safe, legal abortion.
- **Gender-neutral:** The unfortunate reality is that too many people in the U.S. face barriers to safe, legal abortion.
- **Gender-inclusive:** The unfortunate reality is that too many women, and transgender, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people in the U.S. face barriers to safe, legal abortion.



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pregnancy

For an explanation of the stages of pregnancy visit, www.plannedparenthood.org



unintended pregnancy

When talking about pregnancy, avoid qualifying it with “unintended” (or “unplanned”) — simply “a person’s pregnancy” or “pregnancy” is stronger. You can use “unintended” when talking about rates or “preventing unintended pregnancy.”

(Remember that “unintended” is better than “unplanned.”) Do not use “unwanted.”

heartbeat bill

Do not use. Instead use “early-stage abortion bans” or “six-week abortion ban.”



women’s health

Avoid using this gendered term. The preferred term is “sexual and reproductive health” or, if writing specifically about abortion, “abortion.”

abortion

Do not use euphemisms like “abortion care,” “choice,” or “termination.” Do not use “reproductive health care” when you are specifically referring to abortion. When you are talking or writing about abortion, **just use abortion.**

later abortion

Do not use “late-term abortion.” Preferred: “abortion after in pregnancy” or, if necessary, “later abortion.”



mother

Do not use to describe a pregnant woman, e.g., “abortion to save the life of the pregnant person” (not “mother”). Preferred word is parent.