

Guidance on communicating about cultures that are not your own

September 1, 2021

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Article type: [News](#)

The AAP has released guidance called Words Matter (<https://bit.ly/3uK8pe6>) to help members use anti-biased and inclusive language that focuses on being person-centered, specific and contextualized. For pediatricians who are interested in public messaging and contributing to AAP publications, this is a valuable resource. It is a reminder of how the words we choose are critical to successful communication with the people who rely on our expertise in children's health.

The guidance helps us support the people who have been historically excluded from a seat at the table or denied a turn at the microphone.

Improving our language is a continuous goal, but the most effective way to be inclusive is to allow and assist people in speaking for themselves. The difference between communication from someone with a lived experience and someone with a learned experience is comparable to the difference between a digital native (someone who was born into the digital social environment) and a digital immigrant (someone who learns the digital social culture and language as an adult).

No one is the ultimate cultural authority because culture changes with every person it embraces. However, those from the culture deserve more recognition.

When we are immigrants or visitors to other cultures, these key points can help elevate those from the cultures we need to include:

- Relinquish the microphone whenever possible to someone who shares the identified culture. Just as panels of men talking about reproductive health now cause discomfort, panels that do not include anyone from the demographic should be avoided.
- Include someone from the culture you are discussing in your op-ed or written work. Asking someone from the group being discussed to read your work is a start, but we should strive to work with someone from the identified demographic throughout the entire process.
- Give credit to the people who have done the work. To publicly say the name of those from the identified culture doing the work is empowering; to insist that someone from the culture share the time on air is transformative.

If you can incorporate these three practices into your media work, you will fulfill the spirit of the Words Matter guidance while learning a better way to communicate from people who live in the culture.

Here are ways to use the guidance mindfully and communicate about cultures that are not your own.

- Acknowledge that your perspective is that of someone outside the culture and your language will never be as accurate as someone from within. Acknowledging a visitor status affords the speaker understanding and invites natives to offer correction for improvement.

- Consider vetting your language through a parent or colleague raising a child from a group that has been historically excluded. Have the humility to acknowledge their ability to teach, especially about their children. Many parents and people experiencing discrimination and marginalization do not have the emotional energy to teach us, but asking for help may be rewarding for all.
- Learn from mistakes and don't stop trying. Follow the example of children learning to walk. Get back up after falling to improve your use of inclusive language.

The greatest compliment to those who have been excluded is to include them and let them lead. The greatest insult is for people to assume that only they can speak for a culture that is not theirs. Pediatrics is a specialty of inclusion, and we can show it.

Dr. Hutchinson is a member of the AAP Council on Communications and Media.

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