



Words for Wise Women*

Words create images more powerful than any definition. If you don't choose your words with care, they may send a message that you never intended. All speakers share the same goal – clear communication. Bias-free language includes the whole audience – it is the fair way to communicate! You can't re-write the English language, but you can make an extra effort to watch your language and use words that include girls and women. Consider the possible sensitivities of your audience and when in doubt, choose an alternative. Here are a few do's and don'ts to keep in mind:

Do Not:

- Mention a women's domestic life unless you would make the same comment about a man in the same circumstance.
- Assume that only women run homes.
- Describe a female athlete making reference to her looks, her shape or her physical characteristics unless you would make the same comment about a male in the same circumstance.
- Compare a female to a male.
- Mention gender (i.e. male nurse, female president, etc.) unless clarity demands it
- Show only images of women in stereotypical roles (i.e. cooking, shopping, caring for the baby, etc.)
- Use the term "tomboy" - it has a negative connotation.

Do:

- Lose the term "lady" – it sends mixed messages.
- Show images of women in a variety of roles (mowing the lawn, playing hockey, on the golf course, etc.)
- Use gender-free terminology (firefighter instead of fireman, sports enthusiast instead of sportsman, etc.)

* adapted from Words that Count Women Out/In (Ontario Women's Directorate, 1992)