

Guide to Using Neutral Language

Language	Suggested alternatives
'Fetus'	The term 'pregnancy' may be more neutral for some families until a choice is made about continuing the pregnancy.
'Lethal'	Describe range of possible outcomes accounting for <i>associated anomalies</i> : » Stillbirth, peripartum death, liveborn, live days to years » The prognosis for an infant with VSD is much different than an infant with HLHS
'Incompatible with life'	
There is "nothing we can do"	Although there is 'nothing we can do' to change the cellular programming, there is never a situation where we can do nothing – comfort care is still active intervention (warmth, skin-to-skin, oxygen, pain control, feeding, etc)
Will be 'vegetative'	Avoid 'loaded' words
Prognosis is 'hopeless'	Avoid judgment about family's view of QOL
Prognosis is 'dismal'	Describe range of possibilities (see Janvier, 2012)
'Developmental delay'	These phrases have little meaning to most families. Describe possible skills children may acquire if they survive and developmental milestones that are not typically achievable (see above)
'Severe impairment'	
'Intellectual impairment'	
'Neurodevelopmental disability'	
'Severely handicapped'	
Infant will have a "negative impact on family"	Describe the care that will be needed at home and typical challenges families face in providing that care without presuming how these challenges will affect the family (see Janvier, 2012).