

Sexual Abuse's New Person First Guideline

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It is my pleasure to introduce our journal's new person first language guideline in this issue, developed and championed by Gwen Willis and Elizabeth Letourneau, with input and support from the Editorial Board. As they explain in the accompanying guest editorial, person-first language is preferred because it is less stigmatizing, potentially more accurate, and more consistent with the publication style guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA) (Willis & Letourneau, 2018, this volume). I am grateful to both Gwen and Elizabeth for leading this initiative and hope it will encourage our authors and readers to consider how they use language to describe individuals who have perpetrated sexual offenses.

Authors are encouraged to be thoughtful about the connotations of language used in their manuscripts to describe persons or groups. Person-first language (e.g., "persons with sexual offense histories", "individual who has been adjudicated for...", "child/adolescent with sexual behavior problems") is generally preferred because it is often more accurate and less pejorative than terms like "sex offender". Terms like "sex offender" imply an ongoing tendency to commit sex offenses, which is inaccurate for many persons who have been convicted for sex offenses given current sexual recidivism base rates. Similarly, the term suggests a homogeneous group defined and stigmatized on the basis of criminal behaviors that may have taken place infrequently or many years in the past. Person-first language is also consistent with APA style guidelines for reducing bias in written language (see American Psychological Association, 2010). Authors will sometimes need to refer to current legal terms such as "Sexually Violent Predator" laws in the US; in such cases the legal term can be placed in italics or in quotation marks. Additional guidance on this recommendation can be found in the 6th edition of the APA Publication Manual, Willis (2018), and Willis and Letourneau (2018).

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Editor-in-Chief