

Humanizing Language Card

Boundless Freedom Project — carry this, use it, don't set it down.

Our words hold power. They humanize or they dehumanize. This card is the fast reference for every email, flyer, session, and hallway conversation.

Never Use → Use Instead

Never Use	Use Instead
Inmate	Community member, sangha member
Prisoner	Person experiencing incarceration
Convict	Person with a conviction
Ex-con	Returning citizen, formerly incarcerated person
Felon	Person with a conviction
Offender	Person, friend, brother, sister
The incarcerated	People who are incarcerated
Committed a crime (as identity)	Was convicted of, has a conviction for
Cell / cage (casual reference)	Housing unit, living space
Reformed	Growing, healing, in recovery
Victim (unless self-identified)	Person harmed, survivor

Three Rules That Cover Everything Else

1. Person first, always.

Say the person before the circumstance. “A person who is incarcerated,” not “an incarcerated person,” and never a noun that replaces the person entirely.

2. Circumstance, not identity.

Incarceration is something that happened to someone. It is not who they are. Language should never suggest a life sentence on someone's character.

3. If you wouldn't say it to their face, don't write it in a grant.

The people we serve read our materials. Every document should hold up if a sangha member picked it up and read it themselves.

Quick Gut-Check

Before you hit send, ask:

- Did I name the person before the label?
- Would this sentence make sense read aloud in a sangha circle?
- Am I describing an action or a whole identity?

May all beings be free.

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