

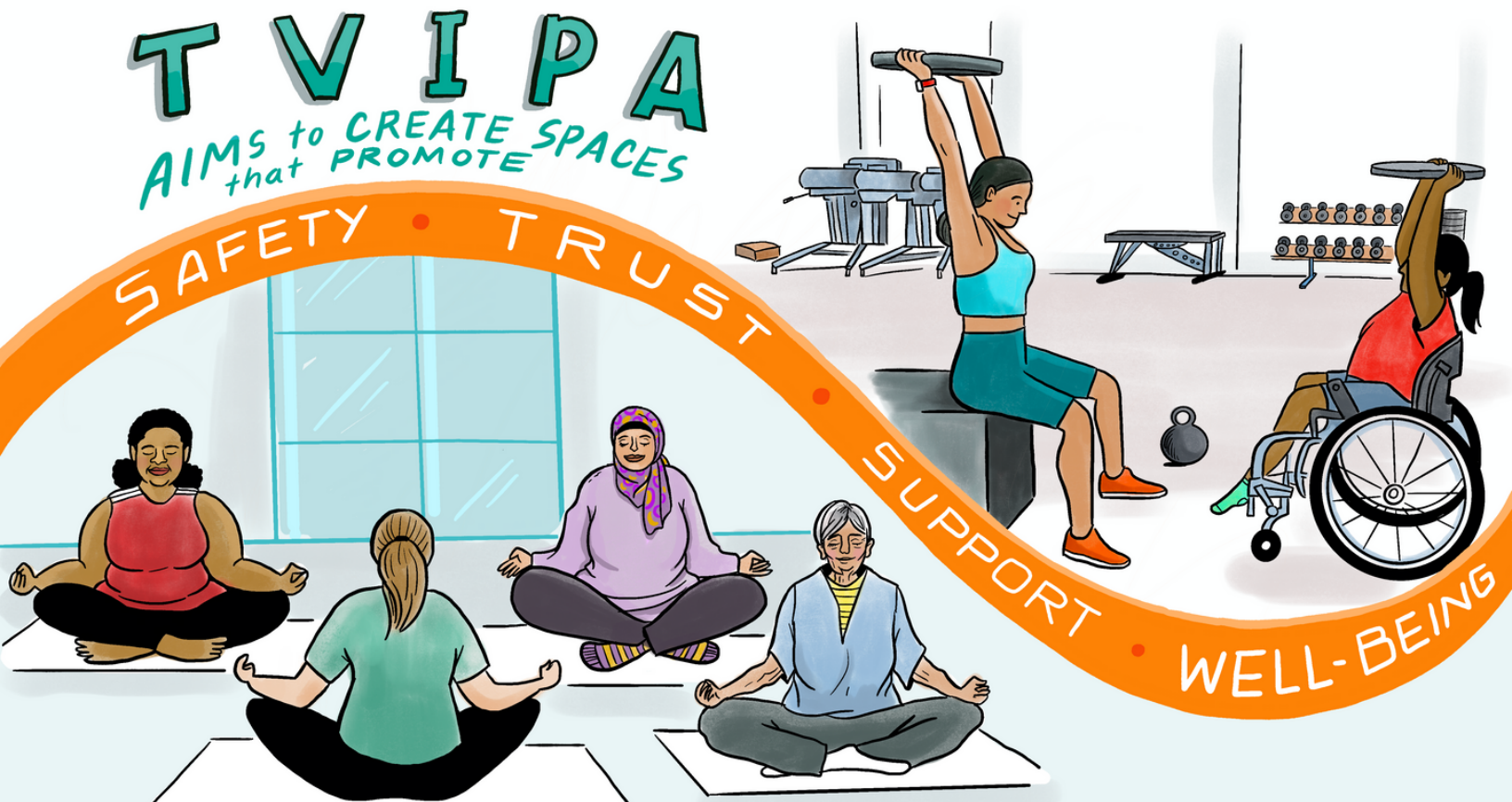


# Trauma- and Violence-Informed Language

Trauma- and violence-informed physical activity (TVIPA) aims to create spaces that promote safety, trust, support, and well-being. Creating inclusive spaces can be done by altering the physical environment but also by being mindful and respectful in how we communicate with each other.

Clear, consistent, and welcoming communication is a necessary building block when developing trust and forming relationships and can have lasting impacts on those around us. Hence, the words we use, the tone we use, and how statements and questions are phrased should help to promote feelings of safety and inclusivity among everyone we are connecting with. This includes verbal communication, but equally applies to images and other visual material.

One way to shift your language to align with the goals of TVIPA is to use invitational language as opposed to commanding language. Descriptions and examples of these two contrasting forms of language are summarized in the table on the following page:



| Commanding Language   | Invitational Language   |
|---|---|
| Focuses on providing directives                               | Focuses on choice   |
| Challenges an individual's sense of autonomy                  | Promotes trust and collaboration  |
| Assumes there is only "one way" or a "right way"              | Emphasizes choice through language that is unambiguous, clear, and simple |
| Promotes a power imbalance between participants & instructors | Recognizes the importance of individual thoughts and feelings             |

## Examples

| Commanding Language  | Invitational Language  |
|--|--|
| "Stand upright. Raise your arms. Now, close your eyes."                        | "If it feels okay for you, I invite you to raise your arms. You may close or open your eyes... whichever feels comfortable for you today..." |
| "Do you all feel strong and healthy after doing this practice?"                | "How did that feel for everyone?"  |
| "We will be in the pool for 30 minutes then you can come out and get changed." | "Our pool time and activity is scheduled for 30 minutes, but please feel free to take any breaks, in or out of the water, as you need."      |

**Key takeaways:** offering choices and alternatives for each activity allows students/clients/members to do what they feel is best for themselves at any given moment. This builds confidence, safety, and trust, and recognizes that consent is an ongoing process.

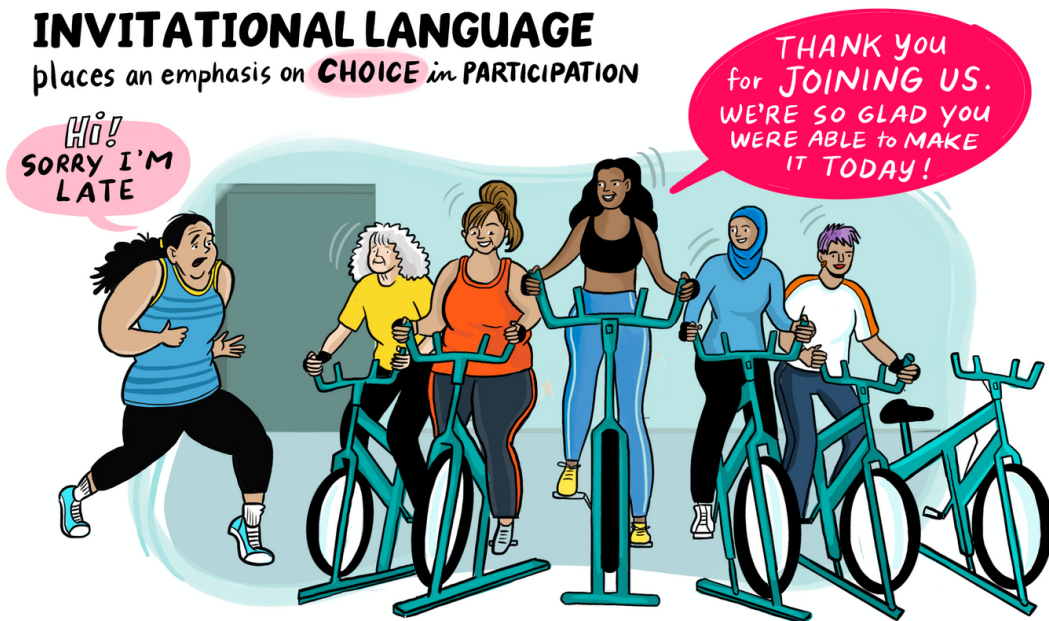
It is not just the words themselves that can make an impact; the tone, phrasing, context, and implication of what we say can be just as important. Even if there is no malintent, considering how your words may be interpreted is one way to ensure that everyone feels comfortable and included in the session. Some examples of potentially triggering phrases and alternatives are highlighted in the following table:

| Potentially Triggering                              | Neutral Alternatives  |
|---|---|
| "Kill it!"  | "Great job, everyone!"  |
| "Hey, guys!"  | "Hey, friends!"   |
| "Today we will be running suicides."                | "In today's practice there will be an option to jog or, if you are in the mood, you can run wind sprints if you would prefer that!" |
| "When you're ready to attack..."                    | "When you're ready to move forward..."  |
| "Wow! You guys look shredded after the workout!"    | "How do you all feel after this workout?"   |
| "Where have you been? I haven't seen you in weeks!" | "It is great to see you again!"   |

**Key takeaways:** use safe, neutral, and inclusive words, deliver your goals for the session in a strengths-based way (i.e., adaptable and allows everyone the opportunity to succeed with their own goals), avoid commenting on people's bodies (even if you mean well), and use supportive, non-judgemental language.

## INVITATIONAL LANGUAGE

places an emphasis on **CHOICE** in **PARTICIPATION**



In a similar way, delivering your words in an aggressive, overly loud, and intense tone, regardless of the words you are saying, can come across as triggering or unsafe to some members. For this reason, ensuring you are “reading the room” (i.e., adjusting your vocal volume to your surroundings) and presenting yourself in a positive manner are both great ways to develop a sense of security and welcomeness among all members/students/clients.

All of the same themes apply to how we would approach non-verbal communication through a TVIPA lens.

| Goals of TVIPA Spaces | Non-Verbal Communication   |
|-----------------------|--|
| Safety and Choice     | Not touching your clients/students/members, apart from consented high-fives.                         |
| Trust and Well-Being  | Making eye contact, giving assuring nods, and facing the client/student/member as they speak to you. |

Communication also includes posters, web design, and other forms of visual information, and can play a key role in the formation of inclusive spaces. Visual media that is mindfully designed is more appealing and invokes a sense of belonging to all viewers. Some general guidelines for creating inclusive posters and websites are as follows:



- Use unambiguous, simple language
- Include images of diverse people
- Supplement written material with descriptive images and icons
- Organize information clearly and concisely

To learn more, check out [this video](#) about TVI language in the context of physical activity programming.

How to cite: Lewis, A., MacMair Smith, S., Darroch, F., Sheppard-Perkins, M., Gonzalez Montaner, G. (2023). Trauma- and Violence-Informed Language. Ottawa, ON.