AIMS For a better birth...

Coercion or communication?

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Emma Ashworth discusses the importance of being mindful of what we say

What are words if you really
Don't mean them when you say them?
What are words if they're only
For good times then that's all.
When it's love ya you say them
Out loud these words
They never go away
They live on
Even when we're gone.
Chris Medina – What Are Words

The words we use are the most powerful influence that we have in the world. How we choose to communicate with other people can create love or despair, peace or panic, they can be the difference between a positive birth and birth trauma.

Language matters, and that's the focus of this edition of the AIMS journal. There has been a remarkable shift in the past few years, with an understanding of the power of words on people during pregnancy, birth and beyond. Penny Simkin writes, in her article, '*A Day You'll Never Forget— The Day You Give Birth to Your First Child.*'

'The most important finding of the study was that the women's satisfaction was not associated with the length or difficulty of their labour, or the need for interventions or pain medications. Their satisfaction was associated more with how they were treated by their doctors and nurses'

How they were treated, how they were spoken to, what words were used.

Specific uses of language and how it can impact on women and pregnant people and their families is discussed in Emma Ashworth's article on page 13. How words are used to protect the Trust and not to inform or support women, is the focus of Yolanda Forster's piece on page 10. Mari Greenfield (page 7) discusses how language can support or undermine LGBT+ people who are pregnant or the partner of a pregnant person, and she explains the different needs of different people who do not identify as heterosexual. For instance, what language do you use to support a pregnant trans man?

Emma Pickett, a lactation consultant and chair of the breastfeeding support charity Association of Breastfeeding Mothers, considers the use of the word 'breastfeeding'. Is it the right word? Breastfeeding is so much more about 'feeding'. Are we limiting what we are saying, with the words that we choose to describe an action?

New to this journal is a centrefold – a pull-out to pinup poster all about language – what's good, what's bad, and what really just needs to stop. Please do take it out and pin it up somewhere where lots of maternity staff will see it! Take it to your MSLC and share it there. Encourage people to copy it and share it widely.

There really is a change happening around language. For years, we in AIMS have been systematically working through NICE consultations, adding in not only our considered responses to particular sections, but also suggesting language changes which we are finally seeing in the latest releases. Women, it says, should be 'offered' inter ventions. Low risk has become 'healthy women and babies'. Maternity campaigners remind midwives and doctors that they catch babies, and sometimes assist in their births. Women birth their babies, and then pizzas can perhaps be delivered a bit later! But still, every day, we hear women being told 'you can't', 'you have to', 'we'll just' and, of course, they ask us, 'Am I Allowed?'

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every woman knew that the only person who makes decisions about her body is herself. I urge anyone reading this to reflect on all the language that they use around maternity, and consider what changes they can make to the words they use and how they use them. Little by little we will change language - and when we change language, we change maternity.

Emma Ashworth
Emma is a doula, breastfeeding counsellor
and an AIMS Trustee and volunteer