

43 Say it nicely

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Level: Intermediate and above

Target Group: Young adult / Adult

Type of activity: Vocabulary extension

Preparation: Make copies of the handout on page 115 – one copy for each student.

This activity highlights a small, but interesting (and amusing) area of vocabulary.

Method

- 1 Give out the handout and ask the students to read through it silently.
- 2 Check pronunciation of difficult words: *euphemism* / *handicapped* / *disabled* / *physically challenged* / *differently abled*
- 3 Ask the students to list other words for **restroom** in pairs or as a group. Make a list:

men's / women's / ladies' / gents / gentlemen's

toilet / lavatory / WC (water closet)

loo (British), the john (USA) – both informal

powder room (women, USA), bathroom

Euphemistic expressions:

May I be excused? / I'm just going to wash my hands. / Where's the bathroom? / I'm just going to powder my nose (women, old-fashioned)

- 4 Discuss categories for euphemisms in their own languages, e.g.

toilets / parts of the body / negative qualities / polite ways of saying unpleasant things – especially death, killing, war

- 5 Set the matching exercise, in pairs or individually.
- 6 Check the answers:

Key

1 - c; 2 - i; 3 - f; 4 - j; 5 - b; 6 - a; 7 - h; 8 - g; 9 - d; 10 - e

Note that dividing the list into noun (*help*), verb (*pass away, terminate*) and adjective (*will help*).



A **euphemism** is a polite way of saying something. In English there are many words for **restroom** (which is a euphemism). They are nearly all euphemisms. The problem with euphemisms is that we always need new ones. As soon as the euphemism becomes well-known, another one is needed.

For example, 20 years ago the word **handicapped** was used. It was replaced by **disabled**. This was then replaced by **physically challenged**. Some people say this is too negative, and prefer **differently abled**. You still see disabled on signs.

Do you use euphemisms in your language?

What things do people use euphemisms for?

Can you match these euphemisms with the correct meanings?

Euphemism	Meaning
1 pass away	A drunk
2 mature	B stupid
3 under-privileged	C die
4 adult	d kill
5 intellectually challenged	e servant
6 tired and emotional	F poor
7 well-built	G short
8 petite	H fat
9 terminate	I old
10 help (noun)	j sexy, pornographic