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# Inclusive Language Guidelines

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# 1 Purpose

These guidelines have been developed to provide Department for Education, Children and Young People (DECYP) staff and students with advice regarding inclusive language. They cover general principles of inclusive language, and specific examples for communicating with key groups. They can be applied to all types of communication, oral or written, formal or informal, or addressing internal and external audiences.

These guidelines should not override the preferences of individual staff members or students. Everybody has different ways in which they would prefer to be spoken to, or about. If you are unsure of a person's preferred terms, pronouns or identifiers, just ask them in a respectful manner.

## 2 Guideline

### 2.1 Inclusive language and the Department

Language is a powerful tool for fostering inclusion. It can make individuals and communities feel valued, respected and included, and should positively reflect the social and cultural diversity of DECYP. Inclusive language plays an important role in acknowledging everyone and treating people equitably, and with the sensitivity and respect to which all are entitled.

All DECYP staff and children and young people are encouraged to be aware of their responsibility to use inclusive language. It is important that inclusive language is used in all forms of communication as a means of showing courtesy and respect for diversity. People, regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds, are first and foremost individuals who deserve to be treated fairly.

Language evolves over time and while these guidelines reflect recommended practice at the time of writing, they may include content that is still in contention, or is under debate. DECYP welcomes feedback about these guidelines and will continue to revise them as appropriate.

### 2.2 What is the difference between inclusive and exclusive language?

Inclusive and exclusive language is when somebody includes or excludes somebody else through the words that they use. The word 'inclusive' means to include somebody else, and this is exactly what inclusive language is. Inclusive language actively seeks to involve everyone, so that they feel represented in the conversation, and that it is accessible to them. For example, using plain English as much as possible so that all people are able to understand what is being said.

Exclusive language is the complete opposite. It involves using words that exclude someone and makes them feel rejected, not valued, and outcast from a group or society. Using exclusive language can discriminate against people and communities and make them feel inferior, especially if they are different from you because of their ethnicity, race, religion, cultural background, gender, sexual orientation, age, level of education, socio-economic background, or if they have a disability.

## 2.3 Why is inclusive language important?

Inclusive language is about welcoming all people to participate in and contribute to our families, schools, workplaces, communities and services.

Language is our main form of communication and it plays a powerful role both in contributing to and eliminating discrimination. Communication is not only what you say, but also how it is heard. How we are described by others has an enormous impact on our health and wellbeing and educational outcomes. Making changes to use more inclusive language offers us a chance to grow and become better communicators while also showing respect for those we are communicating with and about. The use of inclusive language is an important way to reflect the reality that Australian society is diverse.

Inclusive language avoids assumptions about people and helps to promote respectful relationships. A commitment to use inclusive language is an important attribute of a modern, diverse and inclusive society. Inclusive language enables everyone to feel that they are being reflected in what is being said. The goal of developing inclusive societies is embodied in international, national and state laws relating to equal opportunity and anti-discrimination.

## 2.4 Five steps to inclusive language

Using inclusive language should be simple and positive. These tips, adapted from the Diversity Council of Australia's [five step guide to inclusive language](#), will be helpful reminders:

1. Context matters - Language that we may use outside of work may not be inclusive or appropriate in the workplace. Sometimes people can use terms about themselves or their friends that are not appropriate in a professional context. It is important to remember that in the workplace, we all have the right to expect professional and inclusive language (and behaviours).
2. Keep an open mind - Check your assumptions. Remember there is no such thing as 'normal'. Be open to changing what you have always thought is normal, respectful and appropriate to say. You don't have to be perfect – just be willing to learn.
3. If in doubt, ask - If you're not sure what terminology someone prefers, listen to how they refer to themselves, or find an appropriate time to just ask them! Ask the person, contact organisations which make up and represent given diversity groups, or do a quick Google search.
4. Focus on the person - Focus on the person first, rather than the demographic group they belong to. Only refer to an individual's age, cultural background, gender, disability etc. if it is relevant and respectful. In some cases, before you speak you need to know you have the person's permission.
5. Keep calm and respond - Sometimes our unconscious biases mean we can say things that insult, humiliate or exclude others – even when we do not intend to. If someone gives you feedback, make sure to take it on board. Responding with 'it was just a joke' or 'don't take it so seriously' is not helpful. If you have accidentally caused insult, apologise, try to understand how, why and what may be more appropriate to say next time.

## 2.5 What can you do to promote inclusive language?

The clearest way to foster inclusive language and model positive behaviour is to respond to exclusive language. Exclusive language is not limited to insults and slurs. It also reinforces stereotypes, makes people targets or renders them invisible, trivialises important life experiences, opens old psychological wounds and can even incite physical abuse. What may be funny to one person can be insulting or humiliating to another. Comments intended as a joke can be a form of harassment or discriminatory behaviour, therefore any jokes that demean or are disparaging to particular groups of people or characteristics are not acceptable in our schools or workplaces.

You can set expectations about inclusive language by addressing exclusive language directly, respectfully and at the time that it occurs. For example, you can:

- Call out the language or behaviour openly; *'that's pretty demeaning... do you really feel that way?'*
- Appeal to the person's better nature; *'it doesn't sound like you to say that'*
- Take the person aside and explain why the language or behaviour was upsetting to you. Personal stories and anecdotes can be the most powerful way of influencing others.

If you do not feel comfortable calling out the language or behaviour directly, an indirect approach can still signal your discomfort. For example:

- 'Wow...'
- 'Really?'
- 'Okay, moving on now...'

Placing limitations or expectations on individuals because they belong to a certain group is damaging, hurtful and discriminatory. Even positive stereotyping can be damaging as this limits and oversimplifies individuals and ignores the diversity within groups and society more broadly (e.g. *'gay men are stylish'*, *'Asians are good at maths'*, *'women are naturally better carers than men'*). Positive stereotypes can be just as damaging as negative ones and contribute to and perpetuate systematic differences in power and privilege. If you want or need to understand more about inclusive language, you are encouraged to seek further information and training on inclusive language and practice.

## 3 Inclusive language in practice

The following sections briefly consider some key areas and provide examples of good practice inclusive language when referring to a person's characteristics, or a group of people, and examples of language to avoid.

### 3.1 Culture, race and ethnicity

How we speak to each other influences our behaviour and our culture. Language inclusiveness with respect to all cultures is important.

Australia is a racially and culturally diverse nation with rich and dynamic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures that predate European colonisation by over a thousand generations.

Australia's population also includes many people who were born overseas, have a parent born overseas or speak additional languages to English. Together, these groups of people are known as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations. Almost half of all Australians were born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas. According to the ABS 2017 data, over 300 languages are spoken in Australia and English is not the first language for 15% of the population.<sup>1</sup>

### **Good practice inclusive language:**

- Seek to understand different cultural norms around acceptable communication.
- Only refer to the ethnic or racial background of a person or group if it is appropriate for the context.
- Use expressions that show sensitivity and an understanding about events in history that have caused potential harm to people, including harm to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People of Australia.
- Use language that demonstrates respect and upholds the dignity of an individual, rather than use collective terms like 'the Asians'; use terms that are inclusive such as 'first name' and 'last name', rather than 'Christian name' and 'surname'.
- Focus on the person instead of their migration status or demographic background.
- Choose expressions that demonstrate a high regard for other languages, instead of privileging English as a reference point that suggests any language that is not English is limiting.
- Sometimes, the use of generic terms and expressions is ideal. For example, use of the term 'Australian' can be highly inclusive, provided it is intended to include all communities and individuals within Australia. It should be noted that some Australians prefer not to be identified through origin or descent at all. This preference should be respected.
- If it is important to specify the descent or ethnicity of a person or group, a number of strategies can be adopted to maximise inclusivity of language:
  - Refer to the person first, before referring to a person's ethnicity e.g. Sam is a Vietnamese-born Australian instead of Vietnamese-born Sam, as this avoids labelling a person.
  - Use a qualifier in conjunction with the noun Australian, eg, 'Vietnamese-born Australian', 'Iraqi-Arabic-speaking Australian', 'Jewish Australians', etc.
  - Use phrases that refer to a person or group's background or origin, eg, 'Australian of Irish background', 'Australians of Chilean descent', etc

## **3.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

Language is a powerful tool which can support reconciliation and can help to build strong relationships with local Aboriginal community members. The most accurate and respectful collective term for Australia's First Peoples is 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples'. Other widely accepted group terms include 'Aboriginal People(s)', and 'First Nations People(s)'.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Australia's health 2018. Australia's health series no. 16. AUS 221. Canberra: AIHW.

### **Good practice inclusive language:**

- An Aboriginal person or group's preferred title should be used. If you are unsure about using certain terms or don't know how to address an individual or group of people, there is no substitute for simply asking the people concerned and respecting their wishes.
- The words 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal' are always capitalised and should never be abbreviated.
- Many Aboriginal groups identify and refer to themselves using local terms derived from their own languages, for example 'palawa' (for some Tasmanian Aboriginal people) or 'Koori' (in parts of South Eastern Australia).
- The separate linguistic and cultural identities of the people of the Torres Strait Islands must also be recognised. The preferred term is 'Torres Strait Islander'.

### **Language to avoid:**

- The abbreviation 'ATSI' to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is considered highly disrespectful and must not be used. Aboriginal peoples are a separate peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are a separate peoples. Both have their own distinct cultural practices and beliefs, different languages as well as different connections and belonging to 'Country' land specific to their own cultural groups, family connections and community connections.
- In Tasmania, the term 'Indigenous' is generally not used to describe Tasmanian Aboriginal people and may cause insult.
- The language used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is still often negative and stereotypical. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples must not be described in racial group terms (e.g. as 'blacks', 'natives' or 'Aborigines').
- Similarly, terms such as 'of Aboriginal descent', 'has Aboriginal heritage', or 'of Aboriginal background' do not relate to the full reality of what it is to be Aboriginal and must not be used. Terms that distinguish between Aboriginal people in terms of 'racial purity', e.g. 'full-blood Aborigines', 'half-caste', 'part-Aboriginal', 'percentage', are often used to serve discriminatory purposes, do not reflect the reality of being Aboriginal and treat people as less than whole, and must not be used. Unless direct reference to historical documents stating such terms.
- Terms that are used to denigrate or diminish the validity of First Nations languages or cultures – for example, referring to languages as 'pidgin' rather than 'Aboriginal Language' or 'Aboriginal English', or referring to spiritual and cultural belief systems as 'myths' or 'legends' as opposed to 'creation stories'.
- Terms that have historical connotations and resonances such as 'assimilation', 'integration', 'discovery' and 'settlement' should be reconsidered and, if appropriate, alternatives explored. For example, Tasmania wasn't 'discovered' by Tasman. Aboriginal people had been living on the island for tens of thousands of years before Tasman's voyage. Tasman was the first non-Aboriginal person to record the island. From an Aboriginal perspective, 'assimilation' can be equated with genocide and 'settlement' with invasion and occupation.

Resources: If you would like more advice, please contact Aboriginal Education Services (03) 6165 5478 or email [aboriginal.education@education.tas.gov.au](mailto:aboriginal.education@education.tas.gov.au)

### 3.3 Sexual orientation and gender identity

LGBTIQA+<sup>2</sup> stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Gender Non-Binary and Gender Diverse, Intersex, Queer<sup>3</sup> or Questioning, and Asexual as an inclusive umbrella abbreviation to encompass a range of diverse sexual orientations, genders and variations of sex characteristics (the '+' sign is generally used to represent genders and sexual orientations outside of the letters LGBTIQA). When writing about LGBTIQA+ people as a collective, it is best to use the term 'communities' not 'community', as there are many separate and distinct communities within this umbrella term.

It is important not to confuse gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation<sup>4</sup>. These are all separate and one does not necessarily go with another. It is particularly important to note that a person's sex does not always determine their sexual orientation or gender identity, or vice versa.

Language is inclusive when it respects and affirms people's genders, bodies and relationships. These are not preferences or choices; it is how people *are*. You can demonstrate your respect by accepting identity and relationships as given and by acknowledging and using the words people use about themselves.

Language that discriminates against people based on their sexual orientation, variations of sex characteristics (intersex status) and gender identity is unacceptable. The enduring bias in society against LGBTIQA+ communities makes many people feel invisible, marginalised and inferior. This bias means that people who are members of these communities often experience direct and/or indirect discrimination through the language of others.

Researching and learning words and language that are used to describe sexual orientation, gender identity and variations of sex characteristics is a good way to be inclusive. There are definitions of common terms on page 14 of these guidelines. For more, see the [Supporting Sexuality and Gender Diversity in Schools Policy](#).

#### **Good practice inclusive language:**

- Keep an open mind. It is not always possible to know someone's sexual orientation, gender identity and variations of sex characteristics simply by how they look or how they speak.
- Accept and respect how people define themselves. When referring to or addressing specific individuals, use forms of address and pronouns that are consistent with how they define themselves.
- Use acceptable terms. Ensure the language you use to refer to people's sexual orientation, gender identity or variations of sex characteristics are accurate and appropriate.
- Be open to changes. A person's gender identity or sexual orientation may change over time.

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<sup>2</sup> The acronym LGBTIQA+ aims to be inclusive and representational of all genders, gender identities, sexual orientations, and variations of sex characteristics.

<sup>3</sup> 'Queer' is a term that may be used to cover all sexual and gender communities, but not all members of these communities are comfortable with this term.

<sup>4</sup> Use the term 'sexual orientation' rather than 'sexuality', 'sexual preference', 'sexual identity', or 'sexual orientation identity'. All people choose their partners regardless of their sexual orientation; however, the orientation itself is not a choice.



- Respect people's privacy. Remember that not everyone is 'out' everywhere and to everyone. It is critical not to assume or refer or share someone's identity without their consent, even if you think it's in their best interest or someone else's. Even if they are out, it is inappropriate to dwell on their identity, or noticeably avoid it.
- Create visibility. Don't assume that everyone is heterosexual (straight), or that this is the norm. LGBTIQA+ people are often rendered invisible in conversation, in public discourse and cultural and media representation.
- You can create visibility by:
  - respecting a person's relationship by using the same term(s) that they use.
  - using 'partner' instead of 'husband' or 'wife', and 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend' if you do not know the sexual orientation or marital status of the people about whom or to whom you are speaking. The exception is when you are aware that a same-sex person is legally married. In this situation it can be respectful to refer to them as married and use 'husband' or 'wife'. Purposely avoiding these terms when referring to married people, may be seen as diminishing the importance of their marriage, and of marriage equality more broadly.

## Personal pronouns

- Personal pronouns (she/her, they/them, he/him etc.) are how we refer to someone instead of using their name. They are common parts of speech and can indicate gender.
  - Most but not all men (including transgender men) use the pronouns 'he', 'him' and 'his'.
  - Likewise, most but not all women (including transgender women) use the pronouns 'she', 'her' and 'hers'.
  - Some people use gender-neutral pronouns that do not reference gender at all 'they', 'them' and 'theirs'.
  - Some people use a combination that affirms their gender identity.
- It may feel unfamiliar to use 'they/them' to refer to an individual, but this is already common practice when we refer to someone whose gender we do not know.
- Learn a person's pronouns. A personal pronoun is the pronoun that a person uses for themselves. If you're unsure what someone's pronouns are, you can ask them respectfully, and preferably privately, if you can't ask them, choose gender neutral pronouns. A person's pronouns and identity are not a preference – therefore, do not say, 'preferred pronoun'. Use a question like '*can I ask what pronouns you use?*'
- You can role model your awareness around pronouns by pronoun cueing which is the deliberate use of words and actions to send a 'cue' to others about someone's gender and pronouns. This strategy can be used to politely remind a person when they have misgendered someone else. For example: introducing yourself with your own pronouns (e.g. '*my name is x and my pronouns are x, y, and z*').
- Mistakes happen, especially when you are learning or adapting to changes. If you make a mistake, quickly apologise, correct yourself and keep going. For example:
  - "*Adam said - very sorry, I meant Kate said...*"
  - "*Then she - sorry he, went into the meeting...*"
- If you hear others misgendering a person, politely correct them. For example:
  - "She said that ..."
  - "*I think you mean he said ...*"
  - "Oh yes, sorry, he said ..."

### Language to avoid:

- Never use terms that are or could be reasonably seen as discriminatory or derogatory (e.g. 'fag', 'poofert', 'dyke', 'lezzo', 'shemale', 'tranny', 'hermaphrodite', 'queer'). Some words can be insulting when used by others, but ok when 'owned' or reclaimed by a particular group or groups (e.g. 'dyke', 'queer') in order to negate abuse. If someone uses such words about themselves or their friends, this is not licence for you to use it also. When in doubt, don't.
- Do not use expressions that disparage or trivialise the identities of LGBTIQ+ communities (e.g. *'all she/he needs is to find the right man/woman'* or *'he is really a she'* or *'she is not a real woman'*).
- A person's gender identity or sexual orientation are important parts of who they are, but do not define who they are. Any attempt to reduce a person to a single characteristic of their identity is likely to cause insult and humiliation. Do not describe a person solely in terms of their gender identity or sexual orientation (e.g. *'the gay guy on level 4'*).
- Placing limitations or expectations on individuals because they belong to a certain group is damaging, hurtful and discriminatory. Challenging homophobic jokes and derogatory comments by speaking up and naming them as such goes some way toward creating an environment inclusive of sexual diversity.
- The phrase *'that's so gay'* is commonly used to refer to something which is defective, outdated, bad or unacceptable. This phrase is hurtful and harmful to LGBTIQ+ people and must not be used. Those who say their use of the term is not a reflection on gay people should be made aware of the damage their words can do to others. It is acceptable to use it to mean both joyous and same sex attracted.
- Language that constructs intersex as a gender identity, or that assumes that people born with variations of sex characteristics identify with a non-binary sex or gender category, is harmful to people with intersex variations. It misgenders them and frames their lives in ways that do not match their lived reality.

Resources: If you would like more advice, please contact [Working It Out](mailto:info@workingitout.org.au) (03) 6231 1200 or email [info@workingitout.org.au](mailto:info@workingitout.org.au)

## 3.4 Gender equity

In language terms, the most inclusive strategy is to avoid references to a person's [gender](#) except where it is pertinent to the discussion. This often involves seeking gender neutrality when using terms and pronouns. Historically in the English-speaking world, language usage has privileged men and often rendered women and other genders invisible or inferior. This has happened through:

- the dominance of male-related terms
- the unequal treatment of men and women and non-binary genders
- the stereotyping of gender roles
- unnecessary or irrelevant references to personal characteristics based on gender.

English provides many options for ensuring that language usage is both unambiguous and inclusive.

### Good practice inclusive language:

- Wherever possible, use gender-neutral language and terms that recognise gender equity. For example:

- try 'person' or 'employee' instead of 'lady' or 'man'
- try 'student' or 'child' instead of 'boy' or 'girl'
- try 'parent' instead of 'mother' or 'father'
- when greeting a group, try *'greetings everyone'* instead of *'greetings ladies and gentlemen'*
- Using alternatives for 'man' where the term is generic but ambiguous and could refer to either human beings or male human beings, and in practice usually works to exclude other genders. For example:
  - try 'police officer' instead of 'policeman' or 'policewoman'
  - try 'spokesperson' instead of 'spokesman'
  - try 'chair' or 'chairperson' instead of 'chairman'
  - try 'people' or 'humanity' instead of 'mankind'
  - try 'workforce' instead of 'manpower'
  - try 'fair' or 'sporting' instead of 'sportsmanlike'
- Mix up the word order in common expressions (e.g. try *'her and him'* instead of *'him and her'*)
- Use alternatives for 'he' and 'his' as generic pronouns, including changing word order (e.g. try *'employees may exercise their right to a review'* instead of *'the employee may exercise his right to a review'*).

### **Titles and forms of address**

- Care should be taken to use the form of address preferred by each individual. If in doubt, do not use a title – use the person's first name.
- Where possible, make letters and emails gender inclusive. For example:
  - Do not use a title when you are writing to a specific person, try *'Dear First name Last name'*
  - Use a generic term when writing to someone you don't know, a group of people, or when writing a form letter, try *'Dear Parent'*, *'Dear Colleague'* or *'Dear Student'*. Do not use *'Dear Sir/Madam.'*
- If a person has indicated a preference for title, use the title (e.g. Dr, Ms, Miss, Mrs, Mr, Mx) that the person uses because the incorrect title may humiliate or endanger some people.
  - Precedence is given to Ms over Mrs or Miss because it does not disclose marital status.
  - Mx is a title that is gender neutral. Pronounced 'miks' (similar to Ms), it can be the option of choice for some people. Use Mx when a person indicates this is what they prefer, but not otherwise.

### **Language to avoid:**

- Avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes (e.g. *'throws/runs/fights like a girl'* or *'in a manly way'*).
- Avoid patronising expressions (e.g. instead of *'the girls in the office'* use *'the women in the office'* or, if the term is being used to collectively describe the administrative staff, use *'the office staff'*).
- Similarly, do not use male terms to refer to everyone (e.g. 'guys')
- Using generic terms to avoid personifying inanimate objects as male or female (e.g. try *'it's a fine ship'* instead of *'she's a fine ship'*).

## **3.5 Age**

Inclusive language should be sensitive to the entire age range. This is particularly important given Australia and Tasmania's aging population, education's focus on children and young people and

the implications for how people of all ages are talked about. Where reference to a person's age is necessary, then the language should reflect the humanity and individuality of people.

### **Good practice inclusive language:**

- Be appropriate in the language you use to refer to people's age. Terms such as 'older' and 'younger' are relative and should be used with clarity and in context.
- Use neutral terms such as 'older people', 'youth' and 'young people' which are largely neutral in their connotation. Terms that have become institutionalised over a significant amount of time – such as 'retirees' and 'senior citizens' – are relatively safe. 'Kids' can come across as patronising.
- Use inclusive terminology in relation to age, by avoiding any stereotyping or connotation that a particular age group is more or less able or has stereotypical characteristics by virtue of chronological age alone.
- Try using expressions such as '*an effective and vibrant team*' or '*an experienced workforce*'. Avoid using terms like '*a young and vibrant team*' or '*a mature workforce*'.

### **Language and practices to avoid:**

- Avoid assumptions about a person's skillsets, capabilities or experience based on their age. Don't assume 'older workers' are computer illiterate, and don't assume 'younger workers' are less experienced or have less to bring to the team.

## **3.6 Disability**

Disability is part of human diversity. In 2018, 4.4 million people, almost one in five people in Australia, had a disability.<sup>5</sup> People with disability attend school, have jobs, go on holidays, access information and contribute to society in the same way that people without disability do. The only difference is that people with disability face significant social barriers.

Language is an incredibly powerful tool which can be used to help break down these societal barriers by creating a sense of empowerment, pride, identity and purpose for people with disability. The key to resolving any accessibility issues is respectful and effective communication with people with disability, and the provision of practical assistance in response to their requests.

In Australia, inclusive language is to focus on the person, not the disability. Do not use 'disabled person' or 'person suffering disability' but do use '*person with disability*', '*people with disability*', '*person who is deaf*' or '*musician with low vision*', for example, instead. Other phrases like '*person living with disability*' or '*person with lived experience of disability*' are inclusive of people who may have experienced disability in the past, but don't any longer, and people who are carers.<sup>6</sup>

Other examples include a child with a diagnosis of autism should be referred to as a '*child with autism*' or a '*child who has autism*' rather than an '*autistic child*' or a '*child who is autistic*'. The term '*child with autism*' indicates that there is more to the child than simply the diagnosis of autism. Similarly, a student may have a learning disability, but they must not be referred to as a '*learning disabled*' student.

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2018, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/C258C88A7AA5A87ECA2568A9001393E8?Opendocument> (accessed 11 March 2020).

<sup>6</sup> Australian Network on Disability, *Inclusive Language*, <https://www.and.org.au/pages/inclusive-language.html> (accessed 11 March 2020).

### **Good practice inclusive language:**

- Use person-first language, which focuses on the individual not the disability.
- Talk directly to the person with disability, not the other people who may be with them (such as an Auslan interpreter).
- Ask the person first if they want assistance, and if they answer yes, ask how you can best assist them. Do not assume they need assistance, or that you know what they require.
- Refer to a person's disability only when necessary and appropriate.
- Use terms that recognise that the disability is only one characteristic of the person or group.
- Relax, be willing to communicate, listen and (where possible) ask the individual what their language preferences are.
- Change the focus from disability, to accessibility – for example, parking spaces specifically designed for people who use wheelchairs are '*accessible parking spaces*' not '*disabled parking spaces*'. The same goes for accessible rooms, accessible lifts, accessible toilets, etc.
- If a person is deaf or has a hearing impairment:
  - make sure you face the person when you speak
  - move away from areas with lots of background noise
  - have a pen and paper to help you communicate, if necessary.
- If a person has a vision impairment or is blind:
  - identify yourself by name to them
  - if appropriate, ask for their name so you can address them directly and they know you are talking to them
  - if the person asks for assistance to go somewhere, ask which side they would prefer that you stand and offer your arm so they can hold onto it.

### **Language and practices to avoid:**

- Do not pat, talk to, or otherwise distract a guide dog or other assistance animal.<sup>7</sup>
- Do not use the use of the term 'special' when referring to people with disability.
- Do not use terminology that implies victimhood or suffering as part of any illness, disease, disability or impairment.
- Do not use language that implies a person with disability is inspirational because of their disability.
- Avoid exclusive phrases such as tone deaf or blind spot.

In relation to making information accessible, it is important to not make assumptions about how people can receive or communicate information. The best approach is to make important information available to all people in a variety of formats, including: orally by staff (in person or over the phone, including for people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment through an Auslan Interpreter), hard copy written material (including a large 18 font size print option), electronic formats by email or website, on a USB, or as an audio recording. When it comes to employment, don't assume the tasks that a staff member with disability can and cannot undertake. A person with disability knows their

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Access for all: Improving accessibility for consumers with disability* (2016), <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/publications/access-all-improving-accessibility-consumers-disability#fn33> (accessed 11 March 2020).

capacity better than you do. Instead, it may be appropriate to enquire if the person needs any supports or adjustments to complete their work. Speak to HR for further advice.

The Australian Network on Disability has produced a [checklist](#) for planning and running accessible events.

### 3.7 Socioeconomic status and location

Another way that discrimination can occur through language is in relation to perceived or actual economic status (usually poverty) and, linked to this, geolocation (usually rural or suburban). People are often assigned particular characteristics (almost always negatively) on the basis of factors such as where they live: sometimes even their postcode, how they speak, their cultural preferences, perceived levels of income and access to financial resources, and their physical appearance. People are typically unfairly and inaccurately judged against some perceived but rarely defined norm.

#### Good practice inclusive language:

- Treat all people, regardless of their perceived or actual economic circumstances or where they live, with respect, fairness and dignity.
- Only refer to location and relative economic circumstances where this is appropriate for the context.

#### Language and practices to avoid:

- Avoid negative terms relating to location or status, such as ‘bogans’, ‘westies’, ‘smiffies’, etc.
- Do not make value judgements based on irrelevant characteristics.

### 3.8 Conclusion

There is no place in public discourse, legally or ethically, for insensitive, inaccurate or derogatory language stereotypes that are based on factors such as ability/disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, race or cultural background.

Used with care and sensitivity, language can play a powerful role in minimising conflict and building connections between individuals and groups. In this way, it can play an important part in building a society in which all people are valued and feel included.

Ultimately, everyone within DECYP has the right and responsibility to inclusive language, and together, we have the shared capacity to live our DECYP values of **Connection, Courage, Growth, Respect, and Responsibility**, while also working towards improving our respectful and inclusive culture.

## Definitions

#### A note on definitions

The following are some commonly used terms in Australia. Their meanings are continually being contested and there is no worldwide agreement on them. Many of these words have different meanings depending on context, politics, place or culture. DECYP acknowledges that some people

may not agree with the definitions below and respects everyone's right to identify in any way they choose.

## Discrimination

Discrimination is less favourable treatment of a person because of a personal characteristic, such as race, gender, sexual orientation or disability, or treating everyone the same way where to do so has a disadvantageous effect on a person or group of people because of a shared personal characteristic. **Discriminating against a person or group of people means treating people less favourably than others or doing something that has a less favourable effect on someone because of their personal characteristics.** Discrimination does not have to be intentional, nor does the effect have to be intended, for it to be unlawful. So, discrimination includes, for example:

- calling a person a name that relates to a personal characteristic
- specifically excluding a person from an activity because of a personal characteristic, e.g., excluding a boy from a cooking class
- having steps onto the podium/stage in the school assembly hall, as this excludes a person in a wheelchair from independently getting onto the stage/podium
- using heterosexual examples only when talking about families, as this has the effect of excluding students with same-sex parents from being seen as part of the school community.

## Gender

Part of how you understand who you are and how you interact with other people. Many people understand their gender as being female or male. Some people understand their gender as a combination of these or neither. Gender can be expressed in different ways, such as through behaviour or physical appearance.

## Gender identity

Has nothing to do with sexual orientation. This is important to understand. Gender identity is an inner sense of oneself as man, woman, masculine, feminine, neither, both, or moving around freely between or outside of the gender binary.

## LGBTIQA+ communities

The 'LGBTIQA+' acronym is widely used and has been adopted by all Tasmanian Government Departments because it is recognisable by many and is inclusive of diverse expressions of body, relationship, gender and biological sex. However, there are other terminologies and expressions that people use, and that all language evolves and changes. The definitions below are just some of those an individual may use.

- **Lesbian** is a woman who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other women.
- **Gay** is a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.
- **Bisexual** is a person emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way or to the same degree.
- **Transgender/Trans** is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

- **Gender diverse** generally refers to a range of genders expressed in different ways. There are many terms used by gender diverse people to describe themselves. Language in this space is dynamic, particularly among young people, who are more likely to describe themselves as **Non-Binary**.
- **Intersex** refers to people with innate genetic, hormonal or physical sex characteristics that do not conform to medical norms for female or male bodies. Being intersex is a naturally occurring variation in humans and there are lots of ways someone can be intersex.
- **Queer** is a term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations. Some people use queer to describe their own gender and/or sexuality if other terms do not fit. For some people, especially older people, 'queer' has negative connotations, because in the past it was used as a derogatory term.
- **Questioning** is a term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity. Occasionally the 'Q' in LGBTQ+. Rather than be locked into a certainty, some people are still exploring or questioning their gender or sexual orientation. People may not wish to have one of the other labels applied to them yet, for a variety of reasons, but may still wish to be clear, for example, that they are nonbinary or non-heterosexual. It is important these individuals feel welcome and included in the acronym.
- **Asexuality** is a sexual orientation and a term used to describe someone who does not experience sexual attraction toward individuals of any gender.

## Misgendering

A term for describing or addressing someone using language that does not match how that person identifies their own gender or body. Misgendering is insulting and humiliating. If you hear others misgendering a person, politely correct them.

## Pronoun cueing

Using words and actions to send a 'cue' about someone's gender. Respectful pronoun cueing helps to make our schools and workplaces more inclusive. Let's say we are talking to a co-worker about a trans woman who was classified as 'male' and who is often mistaken for a man due to her deep voice and her appearance. Using respectful pronoun cueing, we would say '*she was in the office today*' or '*this woman is here to see you*'. This promotes inclusion and reduces misgendering.

## Sex

The legal status that was initially determined by sex characteristics observed at birth. Sex characteristics are a person's physical sex features, such as their chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs.

## Sexual orientation

Describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction to another person. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the same.

## Stereotyping

Presuming a range of things about people based on their personal characteristics such as their appearance, apparent intelligence, personality or character, or their gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, cultural background, age, location, level of education, socioeconomic status or disability. Stereotypes are usually used in a negative way and are often evidence of prejudice against others. Even when a remark or action based on a stereotype is not based on a conscious prejudice it can



still be hurtful and cause harm or damage to the person. Positive stereotyping can contribute to and perpetuate systematic differences in power and privilege.

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## Related policies

- [Augmentative and Alternative Communication in Schools Policy](#)
- [Respectful Schools Respectful Behaviour](#)
- [Supporting Sexuality, Sex and Gender Diversity in Schools Policy](#)

## Related procedures

- N/A

## Supporting information/tools

- [26TEN / Communicate Clearly / What is Plain English?](#)
- [Child and Student Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2021](#)
- [Good Teaching: Inclusive Schools - Disability Focus](#)
- [Good Teaching: Inclusive Teaching for Students with Disability](#)

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