

Inclusive Language Guide

Using inclusive language creates a more open and respectful environment, and helps break down prejudice, stigma and stereotypes. This document contains definitions, explanations and handy tips that are useful in avoiding making assumptions about a person's gender or sexual orientation or using language that can cause offence.

What's the difference between sex, gender and sexual orientation?

Sex is conventionally assigned at birth based on a person's body; most people are assigned either male or female. However, naturally occurring intersex conditions (variation of sex characteristics) demonstrate that sex in fact exists across a spectrum.

Gender is one's concept of oneself as male, female, a blend of both or neither. Gender can correlate with a person's assigned sex at birth, or it can differ. Examples of different genders include (but are not limited to) **non-binary, cisgender, genderfluid, trans woman, trans man, agender** and **pangender**.

Cisgender is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth.

Sexual orientation is used to describe a person's romantic and/or sexual attraction. This can be for people of the same gender, a different gender, multiple genders or none.

What do heterosexism and heteronormativity refer to?

Heterosexism is the assumption that being 'straight' is the norm. **Heteronormativity** is the assumption that heterosexuality is the superior sexual orientation, that gender is binary and that gender roles are fixed. These prejudiced assumptions lead to the belief that anything other than traditional cisgender heterosexuality is unnatural.

Tip: avoid heteronormativity/heterosexism by using language like 'partner' instead of 'wife/husband'.

What are pronouns?

Pronouns are how we refer to someone when we do not use their name. By default the English language genders pronouns (e.g. '**she/her**', '**he/his**'), but there are a range of gender-*neutral* pronouns you can use – the most common is '**they/them**'. Some people use multiple pronouns (e.g. **him** and **they**) or no pronouns (i.e. people who go by name only).

What is misgendering?

Misgendering is using language that is not aligned with how a person identifies their own gender and/or body. *Tip: never assume a person's gender based on their appearance.*

Tip: using 'they/them' pronouns is a great way to avoid misgendering someone – and it never hurts to ask someone what pronoun to use!

Avoid offensive questions

Most people would find it inappropriate to be asked questions about their body or their sexuality. Asking someone questions like, 'Are you really a guy?', 'Did you used to be a woman?' or 'You've got kids, what do you mean you're a lesbian?' is not appropriate. You don't have to share your medical or personal history, why should they?

Handy language hints		
Gendered language	Inclusive language	Example
he/him, she/her	they/them	<i>They left <u>their</u> jacket in the theatre.</i>
boyfriend/girlfriend, husband/wife	partner	<i>Your <u>partner</u> already showed me your tickets.</i>
hey guys	hey folks, hey everyone	<i>Hey <u>folks</u>, just letting you know tonight's performance is about to begin.</i>
lady, man	person	<i>That <u>person</u> sitting in the front row.</i>
ladies and gentlemen	distinguished guests	<i>Welcome, <u>distinguished guests</u>, and thank you for coming.</i>

Useful language		
GSD	Gender and Sexuality Diverse	These terms aim to be inclusive and representational of all genders and sexualities.
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Gender Non-Binary, Queer (or sometimes Questioning), Intersex, Asexual (or sometimes Allies). The '+' is for all other identities not already covered.	
Queer	Umbrella term	
QTPOC	Queer and Transgender People of Colour	This term embraces various gender and sexual identities AND cultural diversities.
BB and SG	Brothaboys and Sistagirls.	Australian Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander Transgender or Gender Diverse person.

Sources and Further Reading

Victorian Government Inclusive Language Guide <https://www.vic.gov.au/equality/inclusive-language-guide.html>

[LGBTI Health Alliance Inclusive Language Guide](#)

Human Rights Campaign <http://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-terminology-and-definitions>

Gender Spectrum <https://www.genderspectrum.org/quick-links/understanding-gender/>

GLAAD <https://www.glaad.org/>