

INFO SHEET: RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

Respectful language is language that is inclusive, respectful and promotes the acceptance and valuing of all people. It is language which is free from words, phrases or tones that demean, insult, exclude, stereotype, infantilise or trivialise people.

Respectful language is not about impinging on free speech or political correctness; it is about communicating in a way that is accessible and respectful. It is language that values, includes and empowers all people.

Language is dynamic and fluid and the meaning and connotations of words can change rapidly. It is important to apply the inclusive language principles outlined in this guideline, rather than learning specific appropriate phrases, as these may change over time.

The Tasmanian State Service acknowledges Aboriginal people as the traditional owners and custodians of lutruwita (Tasmania) and recognises Tasmanian Aboriginal people's deep and continuous connection to the land, sea and sky.

Respectful and collective terms

Respectful language recognises and values the diversity among the many cultural groups in Australia. It is important to recognise the contributions that both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and community groups have made and continue to make to contemporary Australian society.

Aboriginal people in Tasmania prefer to be collectively referred to as Aboriginal people or First Nation people. 'Indigenous' is not widely accepted within Tasmanian Aboriginal Communities. When referring to a national collective it is appropriate to use the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'. This should never be abbreviated; either in written or verbal communication.

In addition to this, many Aboriginal groups identify and refer to themselves using local terms derived from their own languages; for example Palawa or Pakana (for Tasmanian Aboriginal people).

Good practice respectful language

- Be conscious of the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Where possible, consult with recognised local Aboriginal people and organisations to ensure that the language used, both written and verbal, is respectful and inclusive of regional and familial values and preferences.

Wherever possible an Aboriginal person or group's preference of title should be used. If in doubt, apply the general guiding principle of sensitive and respectful communication: ask the person or group.



Language and Practices to avoid



- Always use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in full and don't abbreviate to 'ATSI'.
- Aboriginal shouldn't be used as a noun, for example, the Aboriginal. The word 'Aborigine' should be avoided when referring to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as it is a generic term for the original inhabitant of any country.
- Don't isolate or exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For example, stating that 'all Australians have access to quality medical care' excludes the lived experience of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Don't trivialise or misrepresent important cultural beliefs and practices.
- Terms that have historical connotations and resonances such as assimilation, integration, mission, and boy, missy, miss and girl when referring to adults should not be used.
- Don't make assumptions about someone's ancestry based on their physical features. Terms such as 'half- caste', 'full-blood' and 'part Aboriginal' should never be used.
- Do not italicise names or words from First Nations languages. They are Australian languages, not foreign languages.

Resources: Reconciliation Australia - Respectful Relationships information, Department of Education Guidelines for Inclusive Language

Capitalisation

As capitalisation demonstrates respect, 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander' should always be capitalised.

Capitalisation conventions are often also considered appropriate to extend to terms such as:

- First Peoples/Nations/Australians;
- Indigenous (if it is used at all);
- Elders;
- Traditional Owners/Custodians;
- Country (and corresponding terms such as 'Land,' when it is used in place of 'Country'), as well as the names of particular Language Groups or geo-cultural communities;
- Acknowledgement of Country, Welcome to Country, and the names of other cultural practices (particularly if the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander meanings or perspectives behind the words used to describe the practices – such as 'acknowledge' or 'welcome' – may be distinct to their English definitions or connotations).

Sorry business

Sorry business is an important grieving process when someone passes. It involves not only immediate family, but the entire community.

If an Aboriginal person has passed it is respectful to gain permission from immediate family to use their name and/or image in written and visual communication. In Tasmania it is generally acceptable to verbally refer by name to Aboriginal people who have passed. If in doubt, ask.

Ask or listen; don't tell

Often, people feel that they should 'know' about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, and even try to tell Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about their (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) world. This can cause offence. One of the keys to building good relationship is to listen more than you speak. And, where appropriate, ask questions more than give opinions.

This is particularly important because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are diverse. What may be acceptable for one Aboriginal person does not make it acceptable for all.

Be aware that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from other regions across Australia may have protocols relating to eye contact, name avoidance and/or kinship behaviour patterns.

