

# INFO SHEET: RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE

## GENDER AND DIVERSE IDENTITIES 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.*

### Gender exclusion in language

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.

Language that expresses bias in favour of one sex can result in alienation and exclusion. Similarly, language that uses stereotypes, and does not adequately reflect the diverse roles, experiences and identities present in society, is exclusionary. Use terms that recognise gender equality. Avoid terms that discriminate on the basis of a person's gender or sexual identity. Examples of exclusionary language include:

#### Invisibility

Historically in the English-speaking world, language usage has privileged men and often rendered women invisible or inferior. There are numerous expressions in English that use the masculine noun such as mankind, manmade, chairman, spokesman, manpower etc. Such use of language renders women and persons of diverse genders invisible. Where possible, avoid unnecessary gender references or use non-gender specific alternatives, such as examples in the list below.

SAY 	AVOID SAYING 
People, the human race, humanity	Mankind
Staffing the office	Manning the office
Chair, chairperson, convenor	Chairman
Spokesperson, representative	Spokesman
Employees, workforce, personnel	Manpower

## Unnecessary gender references

Avoid unnecessary references to gender in describing occupations or roles. Women, men and persons of diverse genders occupy positions in all fields.



SAY	AVOID SAYING
A director	A woman director
A receptionist	A male receptionist
A graduate	A female graduate
An engineer	A female engineer

## Trivialising activities of one gender

Language can be used to trivialise activities of one gender or another, through expressions such as 'just a housewife/stay-at-home dad'. Similarly referring to adult women as girls, where adult men are referred to as men, is demeaning. See below some alternatives and expressions to avoid.



SAY	AVOID SAYING
Employees or women in the office	Girls in the office
Team, folks, people, everyone	Guys/girls in email or if addressing the
	Love, dear, sweetie, girlie
	Cried / throws / played like a girl

Resources: Australian Government Style Manual - Gender and sexual diversity, Australian National University - Gender inclusive language, Victorian Government LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Language Guide.

## Including diverse identities

It is important to recognise that not all people identify as male or female. The Australian Institute of Family studies has published a [glossary of common terms](#).

DPAC encourages all staff to practice inclusive and respectful behaviour that recognises gender diversity. Below are some examples of how to be inclusive of diverse gender identities.

- Personal pronouns are used every day to talk about oneself and others. The most common pronouns used are me/I/you; she/her/hers; he/him/his; they/ them/theirs.
- People who don't identify with the binary male/ female gender categorisation may choose to use pronouns such as they/them/theirs or another non-binary pronoun.
- Knowing and using appropriate personal pronouns is a positive way to support and be inclusive of people you interact with.
- Until a person identifies their pronouns, it is best to use their name or non-binary pronouns to ensure that you are not inadvertently misgendering a person.
- Welcoming or addressing a group of people: A common introductory statement is 'Welcome ladies and gentlemen'. This excludes non-binary gender identities. An alternative is to say 'Welcome everyone'.

### What if I make a mistake?

It's important to try to use respectful language and some mistakes are understandable, particularly when you are learning. If you make a mistake, apologise promptly and move on. Don't dwell on it, and don't