

# INFO SHEET: RESPECTFUL LANGUAGE

## LGBTIQ+ 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.*

### What does LGBTIQ+ mean?

LGBTIQ+ is an ever growing and evolving respectful term covering people of all genders and sexualities including Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/Questioning, Asexual and many other terms (including non-binary and pansexual). The letters may appear in any order.

Using respectful language makes a real difference to LGBTIQ+ people. Our top three tips are:

- If someone discloses to you that they're from one of the LGBTIQ+ communities, respectfully ask what terms they use to describe themselves, then use those terms.
- Don't question or make assumptions about someone's gender, sexuality or relationship. Accept and respect how people define their gender and sexuality.
- Use language that acknowledges that we have diverse relationships and families. This can mean using words like 'partner' or 'parents,' particularly when describing groups of people.

Don't assume everyone is heterosexual.

LGBTIQ+ people are often rendered invisible in conversation, in public discourse and cultural and media representation. Across all media, heterosexual

orientation tends to be represented as 'better', more morally correct, or as the only sexual orientation.

Language that reinforces the assumption that all personal relationships are heterosexual denies the reality of same- sex relationships.

One way to avoid reinforcing this invisibility is to use 'partner' instead of 'husband' or 'wife', and 'boyfriend' or 'girlfriend' if you do not know what word someone uses to describe their relationship. Once you know the term, you should continue to use that term,.

Words and phrases such as 'partner', 'parents', 'relationship', 'in a relationship' are examples of more inclusive language.



## Gender, sex and sexuality are all separate concepts.

Gender is 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.

Sex refers to a person's biological sex characteristics. This has historically been understood as either female or male. However, we now know that some people are born with natural variations to sex characteristics.

Sexuality or sexual orientation describes a person's romantic and/or sexual attraction to others.

*A person's gender does not necessarily mean they have particular sex characteristics or a particular sexuality, or vice versa.*

## What terms should I avoid?

You should always avoid LGBTIQ+ terminology being used in a derogatory way. Avoid expressions that disparage or trivialise the diverse sexual experiences and desires of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex people, for example, 'That's so gay' or 'All she/he needs is to find the right man/woman'.

### Avoiding stereotypes

Do not make generalisations about a person or a group of people based on their sexuality. Even stereotyping that could be considered 'positive' still places unfair expectations and limits on others, for example, 'gay people are generally more creative and open-minded'. Any attempt to reduce a person to a single characteristic of their identity is likely to cause offence.

### It's not a preference

Being LGBTIQ+ isn't a preference or a lifestyle choice. When we talk about gender, sex characteristics or sexuality, we're not talking about preferences or choices. We're just talking about how people are.

### When talking about people's pasts?

We all like to be recognised and valued for who we are. An intersex or trans person's "real" name is the one that they prefer to use now. We can use inclusive language by keeping someone's former name, assigned sex and gender confidential unless we have their clear permission. When it is necessary to discuss someone's past, we can use names and pronouns that match how the person identifies now, unless they request otherwise.



### Don't ask if you don't have to

We all have a right to privacy. We should only have to bring as much of our private selves to work as we want to and feel safe doing. Allow yourself to be led by how someone talks about themselves, their family and their relationships. Ask or be guided by them about who to share this information with.

## Practice makes perfect, so keep trying.

People may worry that they will offend or be embarrassed if they use the wrong term, name or pronoun, particularly for trans people.

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 give up – keep trying to get it right.

SAY 	AVOID SAYING 
Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex person	Dyke, fag, fairy, poof, homo
Transgender, trans	Transsexual, tranny
Heterosexual	Straight, straighty, normal

Resources: Victorian Government LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Language Guide, La Trobe University Inclusive Language Guide, Deakin University LGBTIQ+ Inclusive Practices Guide.

