



# Inclusive Language Guide

# About this Guide

Language is a powerful tool for creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, however we all know how it feels when words make us feel left out or devalued. As part of MK College Group's diversity and inclusion journey, we have produced this guide to avoid inadvertently making people feel excluded or offended. We are very happy to share this and hope other organisations use it either as it is or to develop their own guides.

It is a guide: it is by no means exhaustive or definitive. Language is always changing, and in some instances there will not be a single 'right' way to use it. In recognising that language creates a common understanding where prejudices can be reinforced, we must all make an effort to increase our understanding of respectful and inclusive words and phrases.

Discrimination through language, whether intended or not, causes offence, patronises and may also be unlawful. The most important thing is to use language as a way to include everyone and be prepared to change it as and when our understanding evolves.

Be a great role model and show, by virtue of the language you use and the choices you make, that you understand the power of words and the evolving nature of language. We may not always get it right but be explicit in your intentions to try and be as inclusive as possible.

## What if I get it wrong?

If you are making the effort to use respectful language and be inclusive then it's OK to make mistakes along your journey. When we are learning, we get things wrong sometimes. If this happens, apologise, learn from your mistake and move on without getting defensive – you can keep trying and do better next time.

You should, however, be aware that repeated mistakes indicate a lack of respect and can be very distressing. If it continues or is deliberate, it could constitute bullying or discrimination, which is unlawful.



***“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”***

**Maya Angelou**

# Age

Only refer to someone's age if it is relevant, for example where courses or funding are only available for a particular age group. We do not use age as a means to describe an individual or group where it is not relevant, such as 'mature workforce' or 'young and vibrant team'. In these cases, it is appropriate to say 'experienced workforce' or 'effective and vibrant team'.

We actively avoid ageist terms such as 'elderly', 'OAPs', 'pensioners' or 'youngsters'. Use terms that are objective, such as 'child' when referring to ages 4–12 years or 'young people' or 'young adults' for those aged from 13-18 years old.

## Quick Guide

| Use                               | Avoid                         |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Older people                      | The elderly, OAPs, pensioners |
| Young people, learners, teenagers | Kids, youngsters, guys        |

# Disability

People or individuals shouldn't be defined according to their disability/condition or labelled as a victim because of their health status. For example, it is current best practice to use terms such as 'person with a disability', 'people living with cancer' or 'wheelchair user'. Common phrases such as 'suffers from' or 'victim of' suggest hopelessness and passivity - these diminish the individual's life and abilities and so should be avoided.

## Quick Guide

| Use  | Avoid                                      |
|--|--|
| Disabled people/person   | The disabled, handicapped people           |
| Wheelchair user  | Wheelchair-bound, confined to a wheelchair |
| People with visual impairments, blind people, partially sighted people | The blind                                  |
| People with hearing impairments, deaf people                           | The deaf                                   |
| Person with diabetes   | Diabetic, suffers with diabetes            |
| Person living with dementia  | Victim of dementia, battling with dementia |
| Seizures   | Fits, spells, attacks                      |
| Accessible car park  | Disabled car park                          |

# Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity relates to the fact that no two brains are exactly alike – this variety in our biological make-up results in natural differences in communication skills, problem-solving and creative insights. Autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) are all included in the range of neurodivergence seen in around 10% of the population. Understanding and appreciating these normal differences emphasises the importance of not using medicalised or negative language in association with neurodiversity.

## Quick Guide

| Use                  | Avoid  |
|----------------------|--|
| Neurodiverse person  | Autistic   |
| Person with autism   | Autism Spectrum Disorder (Note: referring to the Autism Spectrum is fine, but 'Disorder' is offensive to some autistic people) |
| Autism spectrum      | High-functioning, low-functioning (unless an autistic person is using it about themselves)                                     |
| Person with dyslexia | Dyslexic   |

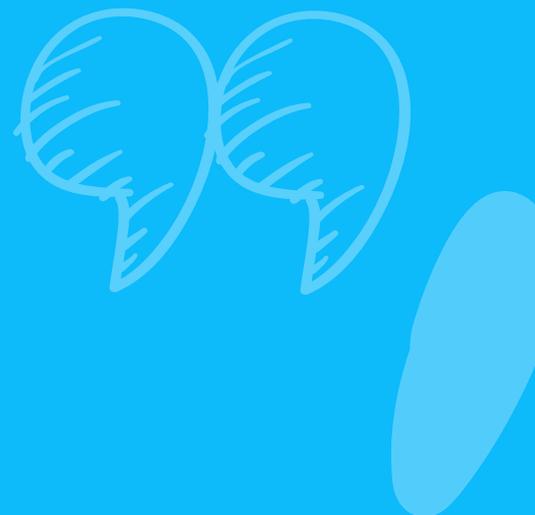
# Mental Health

Everyone has mental health and the ways in which we experience it are unique to each of us. With so many people experiencing common mental health problems, being respectful and thoughtful in the language we use around mental health can have a very positive impact on us all.

Use person-centred language to avoid positive or negative labelling and prevent people being defined by a condition. As we have become more aware of mental health, phrases such as 'OCD' have become more common when describing someone who is particularly clean and tidy or 'bipolar' when talking about everyday mood swings. These are problematic as they minimise the debilitating issues experienced by people with a clinical diagnosis of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or Bipolar Disorder.

## Quick Guide

| Use  | Avoid                           |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Mental health conditions, mental health problems | Mental disorder, mental illness |
| People with anxiety                              | Suffers with anxiety            |
| A person with depression                         | Struggles with depression       |



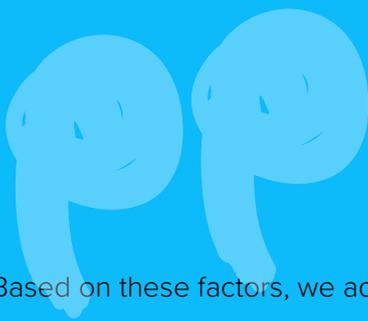
# Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity are often regarded as the same thing – both are social constructs used to categorise and characterise at an individual and group level. While there can be overlap between the two terms, it is helpful to understand the difference and how this impacts inclusive language.

‘Race’ is used to describe shared physical traits, particularly skin colour and hair texture, and a shared ancestry or historical experience as a result.

‘Ethnicity’ is more frequently chosen by the individual and linked to cultural expression and is therefore more of a personal choice. The term is used to describe shared cultural or national identity, such as language, nationality, religious expression and other customs.

BAME is often used as an acronym for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, used to refer to all ethnic groups except White British Group. The acronym, however, can be problematic because it offers an assumption that all non-white people exist as a homogeneous group without appreciation of the uniqueness of individual ethnicities.



Based on these factors, we advise against its use

## Quick Guide

| Use  | Avoid   |
|--|---|
| Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic people         | BAME people (instead, spell out the acronym)<br>Non-white people, people of colour, coloured people |
| Asian people, Black people, White people     | (The) Asians, Blacks, Whites  |
| Minority Ethnic groups                       | Ethnic minorities, minority groups  |
| People of White and Black Caribbean heritage | Mixed, mixed heritage, mixed race   |

– instead, be as specific as possible. If you want to use one term, a good one to challenge people’s thoughts with is ‘people who share a lived experience of the effects of racism’. This term provides acknowledgement of the harm caused and gives context in many instances where a collective term is sought. An alternative, thought-provoking term is ‘global majority’ to challenge the perception that the dominant ethnicity is White.

**We only refer to people’s race or ethnicity if it’s relevant to the information we are communicating.**

**In those cases use the following broad rules:**

- To describe broad ethnicity: Black, Asian or White (rather than Caucasian), written in upper case
- To describe specific ethnicity: Black African, Chinese, Indian, White British, ‘People of South Asian heritage’, ‘People of East Asian heritage’, ‘Middle East and North African people’
- Remember that terms such as ‘Black British’ or ‘British Asian’ do not make it clear whether they include those living in the UK or those born in the UK. Instead, we use phrases like ‘people of X heritage/diaspora’ which includes migrant people without leaving anyone out.
- We do not use the words ‘mixed heritage’ – instead we specify, for example ‘people of African and White heritage’.
- We actively avoid and challenge racial and ethnic slurs and any language that infers or endorses stereotypes based upon racial or ethnic associations.
- If we don’t know, we ask – ‘How do you describe your ethnicity?’

# Religion

We only refer to people's religion if it's relevant to the information we are communicating. In those cases we use the following:

- Names of religions and religious groups take an upper case
- Groups of individuals from the same religion should be referred to as a community, such as members of the Muslim community or Jewish people
- We do not assume a person's religious belief by their name or country of origin

## Quick Guide

| Use  | Avoid                                 |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| First name, given name   | Christian name                        |
| Religion, belief   | Faith                                 |
| Christian people, Hindu people, Jewish people, Muslim people etc | Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims etc |



# Socioeconomic Language

People who live or grew up in an area with less resources can often be stigmatised simply because of this. The words used to describe an area or community can influence how the people that live there are viewed and how these people then view themselves. Language is one of the ways that we can maintain people's dignity and prevent blame for the situation being apportioned to residents, either by others or themselves.

## Quick Guide

| Use  | Avoid          |
|--|----------------|
| Under-resourced                                | Disadvantaged  |
| Low-opportunity                                | Hard-to-reach  |
| Communities with high-poverty rates            |                |
| Communities with access to fewer opportunities |                |
| People experiencing homelessness               | (The) homeless |
| Clients  | Recipients     |

# Sex and Gender Identity



The language around sex and gender identity is evolving constantly and it is important to understand the difference between them.

'Sex' is biological (male, female or intersex) and relates to genes, internal/external reproductive organs and hormones inherited at birth. 'Gender' can be fixed or fluid and refers to our internal sense of who we are and how we see and describe ourselves.

Binary gender terms (man/woman, girl/boy) have traditional associations with sex, but we now recognise how some people identify with a gender opposite to that assigned to them as a child (trans) and others identify neither as men nor women (non-binary or genderfluid).

## We use gender-neutral terms, rather than those that make sex distinction:

- You or they/their/them, not he/she or him/her
- People/person or individual(s), rather than man/men or woman/women

- Everyone/colleagues, rather than ladies and gentlemen/guys
- Parent or guardian, rather than mother or father
- Partner, rather than husband or wife
- Sibling, rather than brother or sister
- Artificial or synthetic, rather than man-made
- Humankind, not mankind
- Workforce, not manpower
- Occupations / roles are not gender defined e.g. chair not chairman, spokesperson not spokesman
- We consider using non-gendered titles such as Mx (pronounced Mix) rather than Mr / Mrs

Where it is not clear what, if any, gendered pronouns or nouns are appropriate for an individual, we ask and respect their wishes; 'what are your pronouns?'

We avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes e.g. 'man up', 'that's a woman's job', 'cry like a girl'.

## Quick Guide

| Use  | Avoid   |
|--|---|
| Everyone, friends and colleagues   | Ladies and gentlemen, guys                                      |
| The person's name  | Girl, son, mate, love   |
| They, them, theirs [if other pronouns haven't been specified; if however pronouns (e.g. she, her, hers) have been specified, then use those instead] | She, her, hers; he, him, his [unless these have been specified] |
| Partner, spouse  | Girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband, other/better half         |
| Trans people   | Transgender   |
| Men, women and people who identify as non-binary   | Men and women, male and female (i.e. a binary choice)           |
| People, humankind  | Mankind   |
| Chair  | Chairman  |
| Quality of work  | Workmanship   |
| Resources  | Manpower  |
| A doctor, a nurse  | A female doctor, a male nurse                                   |
| A police officer, a fire officer   | A policeman, a fireman  |

# Sexual orientation

Whilst we are probably familiar with inclusive language around sexual orientation, it is worth refreshing our understanding to ensure we are up to date with current terminology.

The Q at the end of LGBTQ can refer to 'questioning'. This term describes someone who is questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity.

## Quick Guide

| Use  | Avoid  |
|--|--|
| Lesbian people, gay people, bisexual people<br>Note: 'Queer' can be used as an adjective to describe individuals who don't identify as straight, but historically it has also had negative connotations so, if used, should be used with care. | Lesbians, gays, bisexual   |
| Heterosexual people, straight people   | Heterosexuals  |
| Sexual orientation   | Sexual preference  |
| Partner, spouse  | Girlfriend, boyfriend, wife, husband   |
| Only use 'LGBTQ+' when referring to both sexual orientation and gender identity-based communities  | Don't use 'LGBTQ+' if you are only talking about gender or gender identity   |
| Straight CIS gendered, ally  | Don't use 'straight' as the opposite of LGBTQ+' (transgender people can be any sexual orientation, including 'straight') |



Milton Keynes College is always open to sharing good ideas and collaborating to make progress on what is important. It's essential for all of us working and serving our diverse communities that we work hard to get this right.

If you have any suggestions for how this guide could be further improved please contact Arv Kaushal, EDI Manager, Milton Keynes College ([arvind.kaushal@mkcollege.ac.uk](mailto:arvind.kaushal@mkcollege.ac.uk)).

