

Inclusive Language Guide

Your reference guide



Introduction

There is power in words and language.

At Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, the language and words we use must reflect our values, and beliefs and work as a system.

Language and the way we communicate are important aspects of building trust and connection, helping to empower and include people if we get it right.

In line with our wider place-based values, this guide is intended to be people-centred, highlighting inclusive leadership, and compassion, and creating supportive environments where everyone feels they belong.

Our overarching principles

If you don't have time to read all of this guide, please read and apply the principles listed below.

1

Keep it simple: use clear, concise language with no jargon.

2

Centred around audience: consider what words and phrases include and exclude groups and individuals?

3

Identify the purpose: consider the type of communication. Is it text, verbal, video etc. think about the context in which you are using these words.

4

Be accountable: language evolves, it's not static which means you won't always get it right. When you don't, apologise and take action to make it right.

5

Respect privacy: we all have the right to privacy and confidentiality and there will be some occasions where people do not want to or feel safe to disclose their protected characteristics.

*"Diversity is you because you are unique.
Inclusion is accepting you because you matter."*

Furkan Karayel, 2021, Inclusive Intelligence: How to be a Role Model for Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace

Inclusive language teaches us to value other people for who they are. To be sensitive and respectful towards other people. It is about being aware of the language we use and the impact it may have on others, rather than just using a list of acceptable words.

Language matters, but we also recognise that it is complex and ever-changing. There is a wealth of information out there that can advise us on the right language to use but it can be overwhelming and difficult to know where to start.

This guide is designed as a starting point and an at-a-glance resource for colleagues, and we intend to build on it following feedback from you – the people using it or those who have helped contribute to its development.

It has not been designed to cover everything.



If you have any recommendations for the update, please email:

ghn-tr.inclusionnetwork@nhs.net

Considering intersectionality

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept that helps us understand how different aspects of a person's identity combine to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. It acknowledges that everyone has their own unique experiences of oppression, and we must consider all the factors that can marginalise people—such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and physical ability.

Historically, individuals who are Black have faced discrimination due to their race, and those who are gay have faced discrimination due to their sexuality. Therefore, a Black gay person faces discrimination on two fronts, placing them at an intersection of disadvantage.

In essence, intersectionality recognises that people have multiple identities that are inherently interconnected.

It is a critical concept for understanding how individuals face unique challenges at the intersections of these identities.

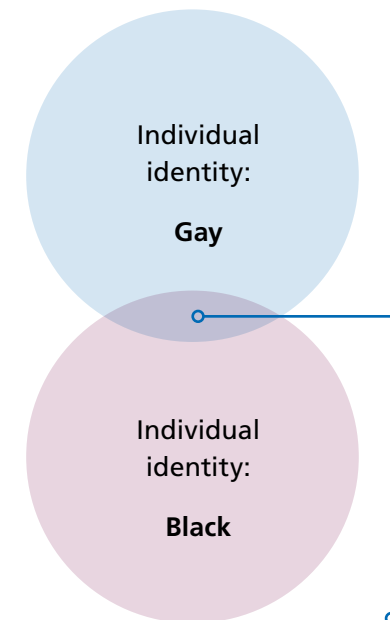
Crenshaw, who coined the term, defines intersectionality as "a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that are not understood within conventional ways of thinking."

It is important to be aware of intersectionality to understand how it shapes experiences and social inequalities. When writing about intersectionality, the language and information used should be carefully considered to avoid exacerbating stereotypes.



Important

When using this guide, it is crucial to remember that discrimination is complex and multifaceted. Many individuals and groups face overlapping forms of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, and classism, among other factors.



A black, gay person sits at an intersection of disadvantage

Considering intersectionality

Example

In healthcare black women are 4 x more likely than white women to die in pregnancy or childbirth because of the lack of access, structural racism and implicit bias they face as women and as black women.

When presenting this information, in some cases, and in mainstream media, the reason for this statistic is omitted.

By just stating 'black women are 4x more likely than white women to die in pregnancy or childbirth' and not providing information on why this is, stereotypes are reinforced as people may misinterpret the information to believe that black women are more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth because they are black.



Important

Communicators must always give relevant context when it comes to instances when there are overlapping factors at play to avoid exacerbating stereotypes.



Disability and language

(including mental and
physical health)



Disability and language

Many of us know and work with colleagues who have visible disabilities or long-term conditions. However, many conditions are hidden and can affect a person's thinking, emotions, or physical abilities, including their mental health.

It's important to respect the diversity and individuality of people with disabilities, long-term conditions, and mental health conditions by using language that acknowledges their capabilities and contributions.

There are several ways we can do this.

Talking about disability

The word 'disability' should not be avoided; we can use it accurately when needed. To be accurate, we must understand that disabilities, long-term conditions, physical impairments, and mental health conditions are common in our workplaces and communities. According to the Equality Act, a disability is a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on a person's ability to do normal daily activities.

However, many people prefer the social model of disability, which states that people are disabled by structures, environments, and social systems – not by their bodies or minds. We should be clear about a person's disability, and if we are unsure, we should ask them what language they prefer.

It's also important to note that many people may not see themselves as disabled but rather as having a long-term condition. Colleagues with neurodiverse conditions like dyslexia, ADHD, or autism might not consider themselves disabled but instead focus on the strengths these conditions give them. Different neurodivergent people may feel differently about whether neurodivergence is a disability, so it's important to be open to learning.

In general, it is okay to refer to someone who is neurodivergent as disabled if it is part of their identity. For example, a person with an autism diagnosis might prefer to be called an 'autistic person' rather than a 'person with autism' because it is a core part of who they are, not something separate from them.

Make communications accessible

Under the Equality Act public bodies have a statutory duty to provide content in an accessible format.

In the NHS, for example, there is an Accessible Information Standard that NHS organisations providing care must follow. Inaccessible content can result in being fined, but more importantly, it means that colleagues and members of the public accessing our communications and messages are excluded and unable to understand them.

Making sure our language is accessible includes using simple and concise words, using Alternative Text on images, using colours that contrast each other, making hyperlinks accessible, using captions on videos and using accessible font. If you are creating documents and content on Microsoft, there is a built-in 'Check Accessibility' function which can support you with this. Another example is using OpenDyslexic font, which is designed to increase readability for readers with dyslexia. You can find more information about how to make content accessible in the 'Further reading and support' section of this guide.

Avoid the 'hero narrative'

Also known as 'inspiration porn', a term coined by Stella Young. While some people do refer to their long-term conditions as superpowers, for many people having a disability or being neurodivergent is not something that is inspirational or a 'brave struggle', it is simply a normal way of living. For many people, their conditions give them other strengths.

Using inclusive language includes swapping terms like 'suffers from autism' to 'living with autism' and avoiding battle terminology like 'fighting multiple sclerosis (MS)' and replacing with 'living with MS or 'diagnosed with MS'. Individuals with disabilities or health conditions are capable and equal members of society, avoid using language that patronises or undermines them.

If you're unsure about which language you should be using when it comes to disability, seek help or ask how a person would like to be referred.

Person-first language

When talking about a specific person many people living with long-term conditions or disabilities prefer person-first language which emphasises the person and not their disability or mental health condition.

This avoids reducing someone to just their disability.

For example:

- **Luc is a person with disabilities.**
- **Saadia, a person who is Deaf.**
- **They have hypermobility.**

However, if a person identifies more with the social model of disability mentioned earlier in this document, they would prefer to be referred to as ‘a disabled person’ – someone who is disabled by a world that is not equipped to allow them to participate and thrive. Our guidance here would be to listen to how people talk about their disability themselves and take your cue from them.

Avoid ableist language

Ableism is a form of discrimination and is based on the notion that people with disabilities need ‘fixing’. Using ableist language means to describe something using a term/phrase or word that have negative connotations relating to physical or mental disabilities.

There are many phrases that are inappropriate, outdated and should not be used. For example:

- ✗ They are such a spazz/ spastic
- ✗ Mentally retarded

Here are some examples demonstrating how to change your language to be as inclusive as possible:

Instead of saying:	Trying saying this:
✗ The blind leading the blind	✓ They don't seem to know what they are doing
✗ Confined to a wheelchair	✓ She uses a wheelchair for mobility
✗ They are deaf to reason	✓ They are unresponsive to reason

Gender and language



Gender and Language

When it comes to gender and language it is important to use words that do not discriminate against a particular sex or gender identity and instead promote gender equality. This can be somewhat difficult when living in a society that still has work to do on eradicating gender biases.

We all have unconscious bias and our views, choices and decisions are influenced by this. However, using gender-inclusive language helps us move towards a more equitable society, where diverse teams with a range of viewpoints and opinions perform better.

Stereotypes and generalisations

Avoid assuming gender based on appearance or making generalisations. When we use sweeping statements or stereotypes, we reinforce the notion that certain traits, behaviours, and roles are appropriate or expected for individuals based on their gender. This can widen gender inequalities.

As a general rule of thumb, we should avoid using masculine or feminine language. For example, using “they” as a singular pronoun rather than ‘he’ or ‘she’.

If you're unsure about which language you should be using when it comes to gender, seek help or ask how a person would like to be referred.

Intersectionality

As mentioned in the introduction of this document, gender stereotypes intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as race, sexuality, and disability. This is something to be aware of as one person may be facing discrimination and disadvantage on more than one front.

Relevance

In many situations, defining or highlighting a person's gender is simply not relevant in our communications.

This can be done using the strategies mentioned in the 'stereotypes and generalisations' section and also using a passive voice or removing gendered words or loaded terms.



Gender and gender identity



Gender and gender identity

Gender refers to our internal sense of who we are and how we see and describe ourselves, this is our gender identity.

Sex refers to physical and biological elements for an individual, whereas gender, also referred to as gender identity, is how an individual identifies with their gender, whether male, female or non-binary, which may or may not correspond to their sex assigned at birth.

Gender is broader than just male or female. Someone may see themselves as a man, a woman, non-binary (neither) or gender fluid (not having a fixed gender).

Born gender

An individual's 'born gender' is the gender assigned to them at birth. This would be male, female, or intersex if physical characteristics that were both male and female were present.

Gender-neutral pronouns

Pronouns are words we use to refer to an individual's gender in conversation, for example, 'he' or 'she'. Some people may prefer gender-neutral pronouns if their gender identity is not 'male' or 'female'.

A gender-neutral person may go by 'they/them' pronouns.



Important

If you are unsure of what pronouns to use for an individual, you can politely ask.

You can include your pronouns on your email signature and/or name badge if you are comfortable as a way of showing support to the trans and non-binary community.

LGBTQ+ language

By using inclusive LGBTQ+ language we show respect and recognition for a community which has faced and continues to face discrimination locally, in the UK and around the world. It demonstrates that we are allies with the LGBTQ+ community and helps to create an environment of acceptance, where people feel valued and seen for who they are.

Language is fluid and ever-changing with the LGBTQ+ landscape, so it is important to educate yourself and stay updated with new terms, and language that is no longer used. If you use an outdated term, listen, be open-minded and adapt as necessary.

LGBT+ versus LGBTQ+

LGBT+ is an umbrella term for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. The plus (+) represents the multiple ways that people within this community can identify or describe themselves in terms of their gender identity or sexual orientation.

As familiarity and awareness around the range of terms people from the LGBT+ community use to identify their sexual orientation and / or gender identity has grown, other versions of the LGBT+ initialism/abbreviation has become more common.

The most common alternative to LGBT+ in the UK is LGBTQ+. This stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and 'queer' and /or 'questioning'.

Questioning is where a person is taking time to understand their sexual orientation and or gender identity.

Be accurate

Just like when using language around race and ethnicity, it is important to use accurate and respectful terms. This helps to educate others and challenges stereotypes. Refrain from making assumptions about someone's sexual orientation or gender identity based on appearance or any other factor. This is known as 'misgendering' and can cause distress and hurt. Remember that LGBTQ+ individuals are diverse and may have different experiences and identities.

Your approach should be led by how an individual or group wants to be referred to. If you are unsure of this, simply ask how an individual would like to be referred to or use their name and gender-neutral pronouns such as 'they' rather than binary terms like 'he' or 'she', 'ladies and gentlemen' or 'men and women'.

For an example of an inclusive greeting at an event, it would be better to start with 'good evening everyone'.

Pronouns

Pronouns are important and should not be assumed. For transgender people, using the wrong pronoun can be uncomfortable and painful. They may prefer to be referred to as they/them unless they have stated otherwise. To reduce discomfort and promote inclusivity, we should move towards using gender-neutral language and terms.

Supporting the LGBTQ+ community can be as simple as sharing and explaining our pronoun preferences. Many people are now adding their pronouns to social media profiles or email signatures to normalise the process of stating one's gender. This is one of the easiest ways to be an LGBTQ+ ally.

Additionally, it is crucial to refer to a person by the name they have given you and not use their 'deadname'. To deadname is to call someone by a name they no longer use, such as a name a transgender person had before transitioning. This can feel invalidating.

Being respectful of people's pronouns and gender identities is essential. If you are unsure of someone's pronouns and it is not appropriate to ask, using 'they/them' pronouns can help ensure comfort and respect.

The use of 'queer'

Some people in the LGBTQ+ community prefer to call themselves 'queer' because they don't want to use a specific label like 'lesbian', 'gay', or 'trans'. However, because 'queer' was used as an insult in the past, some people might still find it offensive. It's important to ask individuals what terms they prefer.

Many in the LGBTQ+ community have taken back the word 'queer' and use it with pride. But because of its history as a slur, some people, especially older generations, may feel unsure or uncomfortable using it. This shows how language can change over time. The best advice is to use the term 'queer' only if the person uses it to describe themselves.

Privacy

We all have the right to privacy and confidentiality and there will be some occasions when people do not want to or feel safe to disclose their gender identity.

It is not always appropriate to ask a person about their sexual orientation or gender identity – read the room and think about the situation you are in.

LGBTQ+ inclusive communications

We should consider the LGBTQ+ community in our communications to ensure they are included. This could include removing titles such as 'Mr, Ms, Mr and Mrs' for communications, removing gender boxes on forms where it is unnecessary, avoiding heteronormativity (the idea that everyone is or should be heterosexual) and making sure the community is visibly included in materials.

By including and having representatives from the LGBTQ+ community involved in the communications we produce we will ensure they are more inclusive. Listen to the community, hear their stories and reflect it back in the communications we create. When collecting equality monitoring data, we need to ensure we are reflective of gender-neutral terms.



Race and language



Race and language

When it comes to race, ethnicity and language, the words we use will often depend on the context in which we are using them and which community or group we are referring to.

By using the correct language when it comes to race, we can avoid furthering racial prejudice and discrimination and move towards equality. As with any other groups that may share some commonality, it is important to avoid generalisation or homogenising a group. It is important to note that it is not always appropriate to mention a community's or a person's race or ethnicity, so think about when and whether it is necessary to mention it.

Race	Race focuses on physical appearance, primarily skin colour and bone structure.
Ethnicity	Ethnicity refers to our cultural identification in international law and how this is articulated. A group of people with related traits in culture, faith, food, language and heritage could belong to a similar ethnic group.
Heritage	Heritage refers to an individual's ancestors and what they identified with. For instance, someone born in Ireland to parents from Nigeria could say they have African heritage. They may not share the ethnicity (perhaps they can't speak a Nigerian language) and may be Irish in terms of nationality
Nationality	Nationality refers to the place where someone was born and or holds citizenship. Where you live and your ethnicity can also influence your nationality.

The use of 'BAME'



The term "BAME" (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) centres whiteness by referring only to non-white groups, thereby excluding white minority ethnic groups. It is widely regarded as a lazy classification that lumps together many diverse ethnicities without consideration of their unique identities and experiences.

Instead of using "BAME," strive to be accurate and specific about the group you are referring to. Take the time to understand how the person or group you are talking to prefers to be identified. Ask yourself how they self-identify.

When discussing racial or ethnic groups, ensure that the terms you use accurately reflect those groups. Avoid using broad umbrella terms unnecessarily, as they do not represent a single homogenous ethnic group. Always seek more detailed data and insights to better recognize, understand, and reflect the experiences of different minoritised ethnic groups.

Commit to continuous education, listening, and learning, as language is always evolving. Respect people's preferences and allow options for self-description when asking survey questions.

The use of the term "person of colour"

When using the term "person of colour," it is crucial to consider individual preferences, as identity is deeply personal and varies. The term "people of colour" can be contentious; some feel it reinforces a hegemonic "whiteness" and creates an "other" category. Alternative terms like "racialised minority" or "racially minoritised" can also be met with criticism for being unfamiliar or overly focused on race. While some younger individuals find "people of colour" acceptable, others, particularly in the UK, view it negatively due to its similarity to the offensive term "coloured" and its American origin.

Always listen, educate yourself, and ask politely if unsure about the appropriate terminology. Learn from mistakes, apologise if you cause offence and strive to improve.

Ethnic minority, ethnic diversity or global majority?

While the term 'ethnic minority' is still widely used and accepted in Gloucestershire the terms 'ethnically diverse', 'ethnic diversity' and 'diverse ethnic communities' (as used by the ICB) are our preferred phrases of use within a health and care setting. However, we are aware that key partners in the county are using other terms, including 'global majority'.

Global majority is a collective term that refers to people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and or have been traditionally referred to as 'ethnic minorities'. Globally, these groups currently represent approximately eighty per cent (80%) of the world's population making them the global majority, not a minority.

Person-first language

When talking about a specific person it is important to use person-first language which emphasises the person and not their ethnicity. This avoids reducing someone to just their ethnicity. For example:

- **'A person from the Irish Traveller community'**
rather than **'an Irish Traveller'**
- **'A person from the South Asian community'**
rather than **'a South Asian person'**
- **'A person from the Caribbean community'**
rather than **'a Caribbean person'**

Stereotypes and generalisations

It is important to avoid the use of broad terms, generalisations and stereotypes when talking about race and ethnicity. There are many nuances between and within communities which should be acknowledged.

Be as specific as possible and avoid placing people in broad categories, which sound like microaggressions

Examples of microaggression:

- ✘ If someone says to an Ethnic Minority person that they are **'surprised at how well-spoken'** they are.
- ✘ Asking a gay/lesbian couple **"Who's the man/woman' in the relationship?"**
- ✘ Saying to a disabled person **'you people are so inspiring'**.

If we get it wrong

Language is always evolving which means that we are likely to get the language we use around race and ethnicity wrong at some point. That's okay and will help us learn. In the UK and around the world, racism is still present, and we have been raised in a society where racist language is used. Often, we have unconscious bias or use language that is not inclusive and can be harmful.

If you get it wrong or are corrected on your use of language, acknowledge it, apologise and take action to make it right. This may be as simple as switching to the term you have been asked to use. If you haven't been corrected, be open and respectful and have a conversation with the person who has highlighted your language to decide which term would be more inclusive. Avoid over-apologising and instead, focus on learning from feedback and from positive examples of inclusive communication from wider industries.

If you're unsure about which language you should be using when it comes to race, seek help or ask how a person would like to be referred to as or which ethnicity they identify with.

“When designing experiences, I pay extra attention to the words I use, ensuring they are not ableist. For example, we often see buttons that say “watch,” “read,” and “see,” which implies that everyone can see or listen. I started swapping them for “explore,” “discover,” and “learn more.” It’s also important to use pictures and illustrations that represent folks from various communities, including people with disabilities.”

Max Masure, 2022, You don’t Suck, Overcoming Imposter Syndrome

Further reading and support

Please see below a list of further reading and support around inclusive language

- [↗ Inclusive language glossary](#), In Communities
- [↗ Communications and engagement toolkit to be used when communicating with socio-economically deprived areas](#), by NHS England
- [↗ How to talk about the building blocks of health](#), The Health Foundation toolkit
- [↗ Bias-free language and intersectionality](#), APA style
- [↗ Inclusive Language Guide](#), Oxfam
- [↗ How to write in plain English](#) The Plain English Campaign
- [↗ EDI Guides](#), Chartered Institute of Public Relations
- [↗ Include guidance on the Equality Act 2010](#)
- [↗ Accessible Information Standard Statement](#)
- [↗ Inclusive language NHS inform](#)

Throughout this guide, we have taken reference from:

Humber and North Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership's Inclusive Language Guidance

.....
[↗ Bradford District and Craven Health and Care Partnership's Inclusive Language Guide](#)



Gloucestershire Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

the **Best Care**
for Everyone
care / listen / excel