

# LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE GUIDE



Care  
Education  
Advocacy

## INTRODUCTION

This resource refers to language in the context of LGBTQIA+ inclusion. This means language that recognises the diversity of sexuality, gender, bodies and relationships.

This resource was developed in consultation with members of the LGBTQIA+ community. We thank them for their time and ongoing commitment to education.

It is important to keep in mind that LGBTQIA+ identity is just one facet of people's lives and there may be other factors to consider within the use of inclusive language. These may include disability, First Nations status, migrant and refugee backgrounds, and/or faith backgrounds. Many people may have words to describe their sex, sexuality and gender identity and expressions that do not fit within the scope of this resource. Please always remember to listen to and respect what people tell you about themselves.

***“There is no such thing as single-issue struggle, because we do not live single-issue lives.”***

– Audre Lorde, civil rights activist, and writer.

### What is inclusive language?

The way we communicate within our community is imperative to building a more inclusive society. We need to ensure that every person feels seen, valued, and supported. A way to do this is by using language that is respectful, accurate and relevant to all. This includes the way we communicate with others, but also how we communicate about them.

### Included in this guide

- 5 steps to more inclusive language
- Key terminology
- Pronouns

### Why is this guide important?

Prejudice and exclusion can negatively affect the health and wellbeing outcomes of people of diverse genders, sexualities, and sex. Language, often unknowingly, is one of the forms this discrimination can take place. By increasing our awareness and practice around inclusive language, we can create safer, more welcoming environments.

### How do I use this guide?

The aim of this guide is to provide people with key terminology and topics relating to LGBTQIA+ inclusion. It also offers guidance on how to create more open environments for inclusive conversations.

# FIVE STEPS to inclusive language – open, focus, context, ask, calm

The following steps may be used as a guide to properly incorporate inclusive language into conversations.

## FIVE STEPS

**1**  
**OPEN**

**Step one** – Keep an open mind. Try to approach new ways of thinking about language with curiosity and empathy. Think how it might feel to be in someone else's shoes.

**2**

**FOCUS**

**Step two** – Remember to focus on the person you are referring to and not the demographic group they belong to. Referring to someone's gender, sexuality or cultural background may not be relevant.

**3**

**CONTEXT**

**Step three** – Think about the context. Sometimes the informal language you use among your friends is not the same as the language you should use with others.

**4**  
**ASK**

**Step four** – Remember, you do not need to have all the answers, so if in doubt, ask! Sometimes, you may be unsure of the correct terminology. So, if relevant, ask respectfully, and in any situation, always centre the perspective of the person with lived experience of an issue.

**5**  
**CALM**

**Step five** – Despite our best efforts, we may use language that is not inclusive. It is important to keep calm and respond appropriately. Try not to get defensive. Understand the other person's perspective and validate their point of view.

Adapted from the Diversity Council Australia's Five steps to inclusive language.

## INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE 101

As society's understanding of sex, sexuality and gender expand, language will evolve. This document is intended for use as a general guide, and not as a definitive resource. It will require updating, and we encourage you to approach Sexual Health Victoria with any suggested updates.

### Sexuality key terms

**A lesbian woman** is romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women. Some gender diverse people may also identify as lesbian.

**A gay person** is romantically and/or sexually attracted to another person of the same sex and/or gender. Historically, the word gay has been used to describe men who are attracted to men, but many women and gender diverse people use the term gay to describe themselves.

**A bisexual person** is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people of the same gender as them, and other genders.

**An asexual person** does not experience sexual attraction to others, although they may experience romantic attraction.

**A pansexual person** is romantically and/or sexually attracted to people regardless of their gender.

**A heterosexual or straight person** is a person who is attracted to people of the opposite gender to them.

**Queer** is often used as an umbrella term to describe diverse genders and sexualities. For some people, queer is a term they use when other gender and sexuality labels do not fit. It is important to note that queer was historically used as a slur and has since been reclaimed by some members of the community. While for many LGBTQIA+ people the word queer is empowering, other LGBTQIA+ people may find the term derogatory and offensive. If someone uses the word queer, it is okay to reflect it back to them, but do not use it unless you are part of the community.

### Gender key terms

**Transgender, trans and gender diverse** are often used as umbrella terms to describe people whose gender identity is different from that assumed for them at birth.

**Non-binary** may describe people whose gender is not exclusively male or female. People who use this term may identify only with this term, or they may use non-binary as an umbrella term and consider themselves genderqueer, agender, genderfluid, bigender, or use other terms.

**Cisgender** is a term used to describe people for whom their gender identity aligns with the sex assigned for them at birth (male or female).

**Brotherboy** is a word used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe a gender diverse person who has a male spirit and takes on male roles within the community. How the word is used may differ among First Nations countries, communities, and individuals.

**Sistergirl** is a word used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe a gender diverse person who has a female spirit and takes on female roles within the community. How the word is used may differ among First Nations countries, communities, and individuals.

**Gender affirmation** is a personal process or processes that a trans or gender diverse person determines is right for them to live as their gender. This may be social, legal and/or medical. It is important to note that a trans or gender diverse person who does not undertake legal or medical steps to affirm their gender, is in no way “lesser” than a trans person who does.

## Sex key terms

**Intersex** is a general term used in circumstances in which a person is born with reproductive or sexual anatomy that isn't traditionally binary notions of exclusively “female” or “male.” There are numerous ways to be intersex and the word intersex is used as an umbrella term. People may find out they are intersex at different life stages including when they are born, during puberty, while trying to conceive a pregnancy or by random chance. Intersex people are a diverse population with many kinds of bodies, sex characteristics, sex assignments, genders, identities, life experiences and language preferences. People with an intersex variation may or may not use the word “intersex” to describe themselves.

**Endosex** is a word to describe people who are not intersex.

**Legal sex** is commonly used to describe someone's legal or social status based on their sex characteristics observed at birth. Often, infants with intersex variations may undergo examinations and tests to determine sex and likely future gender identity.

**AFAB** is an acronym for assigned female at birth.

**AMAB** is an acronym for assigned male at birth.

**What does the + signify?** The + in the LGBTQIA+ acronym represents many terms not described in the acronym, for example, various non-binary identities

## PRONOUNS

### What are pronouns?

Pronouns are words that we use to refer to a person when talking about them, without using their name.

### Common pronouns:

- She/her
- He/him

### Neo pronouns:

- They/them
- Xe/Xir
- Ze/Zir

Some people use only one set of pronouns, while others may use two sets of pronouns interchangeably (for example, she/they). People may change their pronouns at different stages during their life.

### Example of how we use pronouns:

*"I had lunch with Jack yesterday. He ordered the salad but when it came out it had a fly in it, so he returned it to the kitchen."*

Or

*"Hey everyone, I'd like you all to meet our new staff member Stevie. They are going to be working on our IT project for the next six months, please make them feel welcome."*

### Why are pronouns important?

No matter who we are, we all feel respected and affirmed when our correct pronouns are used, and this is particularly true for trans and gender diverse people. It is important to remember that you cannot assume someone's pronouns based off their appearance or the clothes they wear.

A good practice is to include your pronouns when introducing yourself. This is not only good manners, but a visible sign of support for trans and gender diverse people. If you are asking people their pronouns then you need to ask everyone, not just the people who you think "look trans or gender diverse."

### What if I accidentally use the wrong pronouns for someone?

Simply apologise once and correct yourself and then move on. Do not over apologise to the person or keep bringing up your mistake. Make a note to yourself for future interactions and remember the positive impacts that using the right pronouns has for people. Beyond this, use the experience as a learning opportunity and a chance to engage in conversations with colleagues about the importance of inclusive language and pronoun use.



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