Language Matters:
Inclusive Language

The Aster Way is all about creating a fair and inclusive culture. It's a set of straightforward principles that underpin everything we do. From how we lead and learn, to how we collaborate, communicate and innovate. Through these principles our colleagues are also encouraged to recognise, value and respect differences.

Alongside The Aster Way, the language we use is central to creating an inclusive environment.

Words are powerful and can either make you feel valued or left out. Inclusive language avoids using words, expressions or assumptions that would stereotype, demean, or exclude people.

The way we talk is constantly evolving and we know not everyone understands the words or phrases that are considered hurtful or offensive and that changing personal habits can take time, patience and empathy.

We may not always get it right, and that's OK - if you make a mistake, apologise, learn from it, and move on without being defensive, but be aware that repeated mistakes indicate a lack of respect and will offend people.

Whilst not an exhaustive list, this guide aims to educate and empower you to use inclusive language confidently.

Contents

Pregnancy, Maternity, and Parents

The traditional ideas about the roles of women and men have shifted over time but the assumptions and stereotypes that underpin these ideas are often deeply rooted. It is common to assume a woman will have children, look after them and take a break from paid work or work part-time to accommodate the family. It is also common to assume a man will only want to take the minimum time off work. Assumptions like this and stereotypes can, and often do, have serious consequences.

Things to consider:

- Avoid making remarks such as 'baby brain' if someone is forgetful during pregnancy, or call someone who leaves for childcare early, a part-timer
- Returning to work after a long period away can be challenging for many new parents. Consider ways of helping them to stay in touch before going on parental leave and avoid emphasising how long they have had off
- Be cautious on assuming only women are affected by the challenges that come with having a family; consider the effect it has on men too and also be mindful of language and behaviour that may stop them from requesting reasonable adjustments
- A large majority of people that have been pregnant or have given birth identify as women. We can include intersex men and transmen who may get pregnant by saying "pregnant people" instead of "expectant mothers"
- Some people may seek alternative routes to parenthood by using IVF, donors, adoption, or surrogacy. This could apply to heterosexual or same sex couples, trans parents, or single parents. Never assume or ask about a person's route to parenthood unless explicitly invited to, as this may cause offence or upset
- Never ask or assume when someone will be having a child. You don't always know what fertility challenges they may have been through, or simply that it is their choice not to be a parent. Be especially sensitive if you do become aware of someone's fertility challenges / treatment.

Inclusive terms	Non-Inclusive terms
Parents	Mother and Father
Parenting	Mothering / Fathering
Parents / Guardians	Mums and Dads

Sexual Orientation, Gender, and Gender Identity
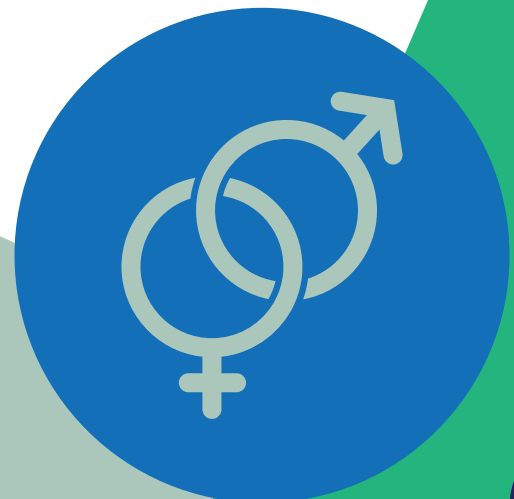
What is sexual orientation?

Sexual orientation is a person's emotional, romantic and / or sexual attraction to another person. A lot of everyday language is based on the idea of two genders and one sexuality and can erase or diminish the identities of others. The use of gender and sexuality inclusive language respects and acknowledges all gender identities and sexual orientations.

There are a wide range of terms that people may use to describe their sexual orientation. If in doubt, ask someone their preferred term and respect their wishes.

Gender identity vs sexual orientation:

Gender identity relates to the male / female gender you associate with, regardless of your assigned gender at birth. It can be extremely distressing for those who do not identify to the one they were assigned at birth; and they may choose to 'transition'. Transitioning is the social, psychological, emotional, and economic processes that a trans person undergoes to move from their assigned gender role into their identified gender. Transitioning is a unique process for each individual and may include any number of changes to a person's life. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to transition. The term 'transitioning' may refer to social transition (changing name, clothes etc.), medical transition (hormones and / or surgery) or both.

Sexual orientation describes a person's enduring physical, romantic, and / or emotional attraction to another person (for example: straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual) and is separate to gender identity. Trans people may be straight, lesbian, gay, or bisexual and a trans person's sexuality should never be assumed, just as you shouldn't assume the sexual orientation of a CIS-gender person (non-trans / someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth). For example, a person who transitions from male to female and is attracted solely to men would typically identify as a straight woman.

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LGBTQ+

Use 'LGBTQ+' when referring to both sexual orientation and gender identity. 'LGBTQ+' is not appropriate if you are only talking about gender or gender identity, or referring to 'straight' as the opposite of LGBTQ+ (transgender people can be any sexual orientation, including 'straight')

- 'LGB' stands for 'Lesbian', 'Gay' and 'Bisexual' sexual orientation
- 'T' refers to transgender gender identity or expression where the person identifies differently to the sex they were assigned at birth
- The 'Q' can refer to 'Questioning', which is the process of exploring your own sexual orientation and / or gender identity. 'Queer' is also sometimes referred to and can be used as an adjective to describe 'non-binary' individuals who don't identify with traditional categories about gender identity or sexual orientation, but historically it has also had negative connotations and can be viewed as derogatory by some, so, if used, should be used with care
- The '+' recognises that this acronym is not exhaustive and there may be people who otherwise identify or do not like to classify themselves. Everyone is unique
- You may have also heard of the term 'LGBTQIA+'. The 'I' stands for 'Intersexual' (neither male nor female at birth), and the 'A' stands for 'Asexual' (no romantic feelings towards any gender).

Things to consider:

- If you don't know the marital status of a woman, you should use 'Ms' instead of 'Miss' or 'Mrs'. A new gender-neutral title 'Mx' is now being widely used by the Government and many businesses in the UK. Alternatively, you may question whether you need to use a title at all, depending on the scenario

- Terms like 'policeman' imply that the occupation is exclusively male. Use terms such as 'police officer', 'firefighter' and 'trades person'

- Try not to make assumptions about the gender of someone's partner or erase LGBTQ+ couples with your language e.g., "feel free to bring your husbands and wives." Instead, use "feel free to bring your spouses or partners."

- Avoid describing someone as trans unless that is how the person identifies and is comfortable with sharing. Do not try and compliment them by drawing attention to them being trans person

- These are the three most common gender pronouns:
  1. she / her / hers
  2. he / him / his
  3. they / them / theirs

- Use `they' (rather than 'he' or 'she') when unsure of someone's pronouns. It is okay to ask which gender pronouns they identify with and it's often a good idea to make everyone more at ease by broaching this by sharing yours initially and inviting people to do the same. For example, "Hi, I'm Sam, and I use the pronouns she / her / hers. What about you?"

- 'Queer' is sometimes used as an umbrella term to refer to all people with non-heterosexual sexual orientations. Although it is a reclaimed term within the LGBTQ+ community, it is still considered offensive to many and should only be used if necessary and appropriate. Ask how people want to be identified and be sensitive

- People who share protected characteristics may choose to refer to themselves by terms outlined in and outside of this guide by way of 'reclaiming' the slur. The use of language in this way has entirely different implications and effects than a person from outside the group using it, especially intentionally using it in a derogatory way.

Unacceptable language

- There are a number of specifically homophobic terms. They are well-known and understood by most people to be unacceptable and should not be used. People also say things that, whilst not homophobic, are considered as patronising by the gay, lesbian and bisexual community

  For example, 'I don't think of you as being gay', 'You don't look / act gay', 'Some of my friends are gay', 'You being gay isn't a problem for me'

- When dealing with people you may cause offence if you assume a person's sexual orientation by a clumsy use of questions such as: (To a man), 'You're married? What does your wife do for a living?', 'Do you have a girlfriend?' If unsure, use 'partner' and don't assume that everyone belongs to a traditional family

- Some people use the word "gay" to denote something being bad or "un-cool". This is not acceptable language.

Inclusive terms	Non-inclusive terms
Hi all / everyone / team / folks	Hi guys / girls / ladies / gentlemen
Partner / spouse	Husband / wife / boyfriend / girlfriend
Chair / Chairperson	Chairman
Humankind	Mankind
Toughen up	Man up
Best person for the job	Best man for the job
Trans person	Tranny / Transvestite / He / She
Transition	Sex change
Gay / Lesbian / Bi-sexual	Homos / Homosexual / Swings both ways
Sexual orientation	Sexual preference
Gay community / gay people (men and women)	The gays / gay lifestyle

Race and Ethnicity

- Race is defined as a category of humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits such as skin colour and hair texture. The term ethnicities is more broadly defined as large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background.

- Though race has no genetic basis, the social concept of race still shapes human experiences. Racial bias fuels social exclusion, discrimination, and violence against people from certain social groups. In turn, racial prejudice can often result in social privilege for some and social and physical disparities for others and is widely expressed in hierarchies that privilege people with white skin over people with darker skin colours.

Things to consider:

- Try not to make assumptions about someone's national origin based on their appearance

- BAME and BME stand for 'Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic' and 'Black and Minority Ethnic' respectively. These are terms used in the UK to refer to anybody Black, Asian and / or from an Ethnic Minority. Although often used interchangeably with 'people of colour', the two terms are not the same

- For example, Irish Travellers or White Eastern Europeans are considered to be BAME individuals as both groups are an ethnic minority in this country; however, they are not 'people of colour'

- Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are protected against race discrimination because they are ethnic groups under the Equality Act. Take time to understand the correct heritage of the person in question

- There are a number of terms for different ethnicities and nationalities and different people will prefer and use different descriptors. It is best to ask what a person identifies with or their preferred terminology. For example, 'Black' vs 'Afro-Caribbean' or 'Brown' vs 'Asian'

- People can have multiple racial and ethnic identities that may not be obvious based on appearance. Don't assume that a person's skin complexion / appearance defines their nationality or cultural background

- Use adjectives, rather than nouns, where it is important to identify someone's race.

- You should only refer to people's race or ethnicity if it's relevant to the information you are communicating. In those cases, you should use the following broad rules:

  - To describe broad ethnicity, use Black, Asian, or White (rather than Caucasian), written in upper case

  - To describe specific ethnicity, use (also in upper case): Black African, Chinese, Indian, White British, 'People of South Asian heritage', 'People of East Asian heritage', 'Middle East and North African people'

  - 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, you should use phrases like 'people of X heritage' which includes migrant people.

  - Instead of using words like 'mixed' race or heritage – you should specify, for example 'people of African and White heritage' or use 'dual heritage' (if not specifically known)

  - If you don't know, ask – 'How do you describe your ethnicity?'.

- Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a statement which has become an important way for people to show their support for black people who have experienced discrimination simply because of the colour of their skin. The statement comes from the desire for all lives to matter equally.

Saying "all lives matter" in response is problematic and diminishing as it takes the attention away from the injustice that black people continue to face and want to draw attention to. The sentiment of "all lives matter" is fine if it were true, but the point is that actions of governments, law enforcement agencies, and society in general can undervalue the lives of black people. People are now strongly encouraged to make steps towards being anti-racist and take a stand against racism. This short video explains white privilege well: What is white privilege? - BBC Bitesize.

Inclusive terms	Non-inclusive terms
Block list, Safe list, Allow list, Deny list	Blacklist / Whitelist
Other racial groups	Coloured people
Underrepresented groups / People of colour	Minorities
Dual heritage / Biracial / multiracial people	Half-caste / Exotic / Mixed race
People from overseas	Foreigners
Black people / White people	The Blacks / The Whites
Gypsy / Roma / Traveller	Gypo

Some terms not listed are explicitly racist and / or outdated and should never be used, even if in response to its use by a person of colour. The use of these words to 'reclaim' the slur has become quite common, but even then, there are movements to stop this usage.

Age

Age discrimination can be a serious barrier to younger and older people playing an equal part in society. Ageism is part of our everyday language and is so ingrained in society that many ageist remarks are often overlooked, missed, or simply accepted. Being older is still equated far too often with undesirable attributes and incorrect views, including dependency and the inability to learn new things in the workplace, instead of the wealth of knowledge and perspective it can bring.

It is however important to note, inappropriate language can be targeted towards people of any age - young, older, and in-between. Ageing is a life-long process. With the right policies, environments and support, people can develop and age well. Many people achieve a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing as they age. The diverse life experience, perspective and resilience of older people can mean they are capable of valuable contributions in later life. Similarly, younger people can also offer skills and perspectives which can equally be overlooked.

If subjected to it enough, ageism can become internalised, leading people to limit their own behaviour and opportunities, describing themselves in negative ways such as 'past it', 'over the hill', or 'too young and naïve'.

Things to consider:

- Be careful of generalising people as 'they' and 'them'
- Be mindful of compassionate ageism which, whilst may be well-intentioned, can patronise people by being portrayed as vulnerable and requiring protection, or younger people as being naïve or less informed
- Don't state someone's age unless it is relevant. However, if you must state someone's age, be specific, to avoid generalising
- Try to avoid using sensationalised language, both negatively (e.g. 'vulnerable', 'desperate' and 'terrified') and positively (e.g. 'beloved' and 'smiling')
- Always refer to people by their names where possible
- Avoid using language that stereotypes or implies that a particular age group is more or less able and don't 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'
- When writing role profiles or adverts, focus on the skills and core capabilities a candidate requires to be successful rather than number of years of experience or age
- Instead of relating interview questions to age, ask about skills and experience. Such as, "What skills do you have to enable you to effectively manage a team?

Inclusive terms	Non-inclusive terms
Older Person / People / Adults, Elderly Person / People, People in later life	The elderly / Old Man / Woman / Person, OAPs, Boomer, Geriatric
An effective and diverse team	A young and diverse team
An experienced workforce	A mature workforce
Proven experience is required	10 years' experience is required
Young people / teenagers	Kids / youngsters / guys

Disability

Not every disability is visible and easy to notice. Invisible or hidden disabilities can include physical, mental, or neurological conditions that limit a person's movement and senses. The very fact that these symptoms are invisible can lead to misunderstandings, false perceptions, and judgments.

Examples of invisible disabilities are depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, diabetes, HIV, autism, and epilepsy.

A lot of language used to describe disabled people can act to define them by their disability, suggest that disability is abnormal, or perpetuate stereotypes of weakness.

Whilst not all people with health conditions consider themselves disabled, under the Equality Act 2010 people are protected if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' (12 months or more) negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities.

Things to consider:

- The word 'disabled' is a description, not a group of people.
- Many deaf people whose first language is British Sign Language (BSL) consider themselves part of 'the deaf community' and may describe themselves as 'Deaf', with a capital D, to emphasise their deaf identity
- Don't automatically refer to 'disabled people' in all communications – many people who need disability benefits, services, or adjustments don't necessarily identify with this term. Consider using 'people with health conditions or impairments' if it seems more appropriate. This may particularly be the case for people with some 'hidden disabilities' such as neurodiverse conditions, or differences which do not require physical aids as they consider themselves very much 'able'
- Use person centred language. Seek to put the person first and the disability second, e.g., "a man who is blind" instead of "a blind man" or "a person with schizophrenia" instead of "a schizophrenic"
- Try to avoid language that frames any adaptive equipment as a limitation rather than something assisting the person e.g., "wheelchair user" or "person who uses a wheelchair" rather than "wheelchair bound"
- When speaking about disability, avoid phrases that suggest victimhood, e.g., "afflicted by," "victim of," "suffers from," "confined to a wheelchair"
- Talk to disabled people in the same way as you talk to everyone else, unless you know they require any alternative communication methods
- Always speak directly to a disabled person, even if they have an interpreter or companion with them, and never attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to
- Never use a condition or disability as a pejorative slur or description of someone who does not have that condition (some examples in the table below).

Inclusive terms	Non-inclusive terms
People with disabilities / Disabled People	The disabled / The handicapped / cripple / invalid
People without disabilities / non-disabled	Normal people / healthy people / able-bodied
People who are blind	The blind
They are unpredictable	They are bipolar
I'm very particular	I'm so OCD
Clumsy	Spaz / spastic
That's unbelievable!	That's mental / crazy!
Accessible car parking	Disabled car parking

Religion

While religions have their origins in certain parts of the world, it would be incorrect to assume people whose ethnicity originates from those countries observe the same religion or any religion. Similarly, a person's religious belief cannot be assumed by their name.

The extent to which followers of different religions observe or express their faith is personal to them and we must not challenge individuals on their faith or lack of. The Equality Act 2010 equally protects a lack of faith, as it does those who observe religions.

You should only refer to people's religion if it's relevant to the information you are communicating.

Things to consider:

- Refer to 'First name' or 'forename', not 'Christian' name
- Names of religions and religious groups are capitalised (i.e., Muslim, Christian)
- Groups of individuals from the same religion should be referred to as a community, such as members of the Muslim community or Jewish people
- When sending communications or planning events etc., be aware of religious times / days of week / festivals which may coincide
- Discriminatory slang terms for different religious groups should never be used.

Inclusive terms	Non-inclusive terms
Forename / first name	Christian name
Muslim / Jewish / Christian community	The Muslims / The Jews / The Christians

If you experience or witness inappropriate language

If you do witness or experience inappropriate language, we encourage you to discuss this with the person making the comments in the first instance if you feel able to do so. This may be most effective if done in a restorative way under our Resolution Principles. If you feel more comfortable having this conversation facilitated, please contact **restorative.practice@aster.co.uk**. Alternatively, please speak to a leader if you do not feel able to discuss the matter directly with the individual.

The person may not have intended or realised the impact of their language and be grateful for the correction. However, if you feel the language used was intentional and potential bullying or harassment, or unintended but repeated despite previous correction we would encourage you to speak to a leader and contact the Resolution hub in the People team.

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