



## **Glossary of Language: Awareness, Respect and Inclusion**

Language matters. The words we use, intentionally or unintentionally, can shape how people feel, whether they feel valued, and whether they feel safe at work.

This glossary has been created to support greater awareness around language that may be challenging, outdated, or harmful, and to offer respectful alternatives that better reflect our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is designed as a practical reference to help us communicate more thoughtfully and in line with the Equality Act 2010.

The aim is not to police language or create fear around getting things wrong. Instead, this document encourages learning, reflection, and progress. We all make mistakes, and growth comes from being open to feedback and willing to adapt.

Where phrases or terms may cause harm, we have suggested alternatives that are more inclusive, respectful, and supportive. These examples are intended as guidance, not rules, context matters, and listening to lived experience is always key.

### **By using this glossary, we can:**

- Reduce unintentional harm
- Build trust and respect within our teams
- Create environments where everyone feels seen, heard, and included
- Support fair and lawful practice under the Equality Act

If you are ever unsure about language, the best approach is to pause, listen, and ask respectfully. Inclusion is a shared responsibility, and this glossary is one of the tools to help us do better together.

### **Here is a list of who is included in the Protected Characteristics:**

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Marriage & Civil Partnerships
- Pregnancy & Maternity
- Race
- Sex
- Religion or Belief
- Sexual Orientation

## General Definitions

Term	Meaning
Prejudice	This means to pre-judge something or someone, usually without any real evidence to base that judgement on
Discrimination	Is when we put these prejudiced ideas into action. We treat people differently or say things because they are not the same as us or what we know — we make known to them our dislike and it can have a great effect on a person's life. In Britain it is against the law to discriminate against someone
Positive discrimination	Is giving preferential treatment to someone from an underrepresented or disadvantaged group (based on race, gender, disability, etc.), often leading to hiring or promoting them over more qualified candidates from other groups, and is generally unlawful in places like the UK, as it's considered discriminatory
Scapegoating	Is when you blame or use others as an excuse for a problem. For example, Hitler blamed the Jewish community for the economic problems in Germany
Direct discrimination	Is when someone is treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic they have, are thought to have, or are connected to, such as age, disability, race, sex, sexual orientation, or religion or belief
Indirect discrimination	This occurs when an organisation applies a rule or policy that appears neutral but, in practice, disadvantages people who share a protected characteristic, such as religion, sex, or race. Even if the discrimination is unintentional, it is still unlawful unless the organisation can show that the rule is a proportionate and necessary way of achieving a legitimate aim
Harassment	This is unwanted behaviour related to a protected characteristic, such as race, sex, disability, religion, or age, that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment for them. It can be verbal, non-verbal, or physical, and what matters is the impact on the individual, not the intent behind the behaviour
Victimisation	Is when someone is treated less favourably as a result of being involved with a discrimination or harassment complaint
Culture	Culture is in many ways an elusive concept. It includes the many expectations and standards related to language, values, rituals, and social customs. It is more than just food, fashion, and gestures. Culture is also how we define our rules of engaging with one another, beliefs about family, work, government, and crime
Identity	Our identities are complex and constantly evolving. They are developed in large part from our social identities, the ways in which we as individuals identify or are perceived by others as belonging to a particular social group based on physical, social, or mental characteristics
Positive action	This encourages underrepresented groups to apply but still requires decisions to be based on merit, using methods like quotas only as a rare "tie-break" for equally qualified candidates

# Race & Ethnicity



Instead of saying	Say instead	Why	Example
Asians	Asian people	Use adjectives rather than nouns when it is necessary to refer to someone's race/ ethnicity	"We want to hear from Asian people about how this policy lands in practice"
the Asian doctor	the doctor	Avoid irrelevant ethnic descriptions.	"Please speak to the doctor on duty"
BAME / BME	Black African Black Caribbean Dual Heritage People of Colour	Avoid terms that homogenise lived experiences of different marginalised groups.	"We are reviewing progression outcomes for staff of Colour"
Other	using a defined and reported category from this group, especially when reporting on racial and ethnic categories.	Avoid terms that refer to a nonspecific group label often used in scientific literature to describe subgroups that are too small for meaningful analyses.	"In our reporting we will use the categories staff selected, and where 'Other' appears we will explain what it includes"
Attainment Gap	Awarding Gap	Avoid language that contributes to the deficit model.	"We are analysing the awarding gap and the factors that influence outcomes"
Coloured	People of Colour	Avoid outdated and racist terms.	"We are creating a space for People of Colour to share feedback safely"
Legal immigrant / illegal migrant	Undocumented	Avoid dehumanising language	"Support is available for people who are undocumented and may need signposting"
Where are you really from?	What is your background?	"Where are you really from?" can imply someone does not belong, even if they are British. Only ask if it is relevant and the person is comfortable sharing.	"If you do not mind me asking, what is your background?"
Ethnics	People from minority ethnic backgrounds, or the specific group	Using "ethnics" as a noun is othering and reduces people to a category. Specificity is usually more respectful and more accurate.	"We want to improve representation for people from minority ethnic backgrounds in leadership roles."
Pikey / Gypsy	Traveller, Gypsy, Roma, or the specific community name the person uses	"Pikey" is a slur. "Gypsy" can be a protected ethnic identity for some people, but it can also be used offensively, so use the term the person or community uses, and do not use identity as an insult	"We work with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities and will use the language people self-identify with"

# Religion & Belief



Instead of saying	Say instead	Why	Example
You do not look religious	People practise their beliefs in different ways	Avoid assumptions based on appearance. Belief and practice are personal and may not be visible	“People practise their beliefs in different ways, so we will not make assumptions”
What religion are you?	Is there anything we should consider supporting you at work?	Asking directly can feel intrusive. If the purpose is inclusion, ask about needs rather than identity.	“Is there anything we should consider for scheduling, diet, or quiet space?”
Muslims, Jews, Christians (as blanket labels)	Muslim community; Jewish people; Christian people, or the specific group if relevant	Helps avoid reducing people to a label and supports more respectful phrasing in general communications	“We consulted local Muslim community groups”
Using Israeli and Jewish interchangeably	Be specific: Israeli (nationality), Jewish (religion and or ethnicity), Israeli government (political)	Conflation can cause harm and misinformation. Be precise about what you mean and keep it relevant	“We are discussing Israeli government policy, not Jewish religious practice”
Islamic terrorist / Muslim terrorist	Terrorist; extremist; violent extremist; the named group if confirmed	Avoid associating a faith with violence. Focus on accurate, evidenced descriptors	“Police reported the incident involved a violent extremist”
Can you just do it later? (about prayer or religious practice)	How can we plan this so you can practise your beliefs and meet the role requirements?	Avoid minimising religious practice. Focus on practical planning and reasonable adjustments	“Let us plan the rota so you can take your prayer break, and we still cover the post”
Why do you need a quiet room?	We can provide a quiet space. Let us agree how it will be used.	Normalises inclusion and avoids framing needs as unreasonable	“The quiet room is available for prayer, reflection, or decompression”

## Religion & Belief



Instead of saying	Say instead	Why	Example
Christian name / Christian surname	First name or given name; family name	Avoid Christian centric terms and avoid confusion for cultures where family names may appear first	“Please enter your given name and family name on the form”
Religious requirements (as if exceptional)	Religious or belief related needs; inclusion needs	Avoids framing religion as an inconvenience, and includes non- religious beliefs	“Please share any inclusion needs, including religious or belief related needs.”
Bible basher / God botherer	Avoid labels. Describe the behaviour if there is a workplace issue.	Labels can amount to harassment and create a hostile environment.	“Let us keep the conversation respectful and focus on the work.”
Headscarf banter, jokes about hijab, kippah, turban	Do not comment on religious clothing unless invited, and keep it respectful	Comments can be intrusive and can become harassment	“If you want to share anything about your religious dress, I am happy to listen, but there is no expectation”

# Sex, Gender & Sexual Orientation (LGBTQIA+)



Term	Meaning
LGBTQIA +	Is an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, plus
Gender Identity	A person's sense of self in relation to gender
Transgender	Scientific name for a person who is not the gender assigned at birth
Cisgender	Scientific name for a person who is the gender assigned at birth
Non-binary	A person who is neither exclusively a man nor a woman. Non-binary people may or may not identify as transgender
Intersex	A naturally occurring variation of sex characteristics, reproductive organs and / or chromosomes that do not fit the typical definition of a male or female, although many are assigned male or female at birth
Assigned Sex at Birth	The gender / sex assigned at birth based on a person's genitals
Gender Expression	How a person presents themselves, such as style, actions, and demeanour, for e.g., someone who presents as feminine expresses qualities and characteristics typically associated with femininity
Sexual Orientation	Who a person is sexually attracted to, for e.g., a bisexual is sexually attracted to people of more than one gender
Pronouns	Pronouns are the words we use to refer to someone in place of their name, such as <i>he/him</i> , <i>she/her</i> , or <i>they/them</i> . Using someone's correct pronouns is a simple way to show respect for their gender identity and create an inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ people
Romantic Orientation	Who a person is romantically attractive to, for e.g., Heteromantic is a person who has a romantic attraction to people of a different gender to their own

Do	Don't	Phrases to Avoid	What to say instead
Treat everyone equally and fairly, regardless of sex	Make assumptions about someone's strength, leadership, or competence	That's a man's job / woman's job	Let's assign this based on skills and experience
Challenge stereotypes about roles, behaviour, or ability	Use language that reinforces traditional gender roles	You're too emotional	Everyone here is capable, let's keep it professional
Use inclusive language that does not reinforce gender norms	Dismiss concerns as "banter" or "just a joke"	Boys will be boys	That comment isn't appropriate
Ensure opportunities, training, and progression are accessible to all	Exclude people from tasks or opportunities based on sex	Can we get a strong guy to do this?	If something doesn't feel right, please raise it
Take complaints of sexism or inappropriate behaviour seriously	Comment on appearance in a way that wouldn't be said to everyone	You wouldn't understand	We value different perspectives across the team

# Disability & Accessibility



## General Tips on Language & Behaviour

- Use a normal tone of voice, don't patronise or talk down
- If in doubt, always ask someone how they would like to be described, don't make assumptions
- Never attempt to speak or finish a sentence for the person you are talking to
- Address disabled people in the same way as you talk to everyone else
- Speak directly to a disabled person, even if they have an interpreter or companion with them
- Having a disability is just one aspect of who a person is Try not to define someone by their disability Consider whether you need to mention a person's disability in a piece of communication. Often, it is not necessary or appropriate. You may instead need to focus on what would make things easier for them
- Do not ask people to 'declare or disclose' their disability. This may suggest that a person's disability is a secret or something that needs to be announced. Simply ask everyone if you can do anything differently to make things easier for them. Remember everyone has preferences regardless of whether they have a disability
- Avoid passive, victim words. Use language that respects disabled people as active individuals with control over their own lives
- Make sure your work is written clearly and concise, any documentation needs to be accessible to all We want to use language that our users can understand. Use plain English, and avoid jargon and technical terms whenever possible, as these can alienate people to whom they are unfamiliar
- Remember to use short words, sentences, and paragraphs wherever possible, utilise subheadings and bulleted lists to help staff find what they need, and use the active voice, for e.g., "find the pharmacy" instead of "a pharmacy can be found"
- Remember that not all disabilities can be seen. Hidden disabilities can affect how a person moves, learns, communicates, or copes, so approach every interaction with patience and respect

Instead of saying	Say instead	Why	Example
mental, schizo, psycho	a person with a mental health condition	Avoid terms that equate the person with their condition or use derogatory labels.	"She is a person with a mental health condition."
cripple, invalid	disabled person, person with a disability, person with a long-term condition	These outdated terms are offensive and reduce a person to their disability.	"He is a person with a disability."
victim or sufferer of	someone who has...	Avoid implying helplessness or victimhood.	"She is someone who has MS."
midget	a person with dwarfism, or someone of short stature	Respectful, accurate, and non-derogatory language.	"He is a person with dwarfism."
fits, attacks or spells	seizures	Use medically accurate, neutral terms.	"They experienced a seizure."
mentally handicapped, retarded, slow	a person with a learning disability, or someone with a learning disability	Avoid using terms that imply normalcy or judgment.	"She is a person with a learning disability."
brain damaged	brain injury	More accurate and less dehumanising.	"He has a brain injury."
wheelchair bound, confined to a wheelchair	a wheelchair user	Avoid suggesting the wheelchair limits someone; it enables mobility.	"She is a wheelchair user."

# Disability & Accessibility



Instead of saying	Say instead	Why	Example
deformed	a person with a disfigurement or visible difference	Avoid objectifying or judgmental language.	"He has a visible difference."
the blind, the deaf or the disabled	blind people, people who are blind; deaf/Deaf people; disabled people	Avoid reducing people to a category; these terms emphasise personhood and identity.	"This training includes Deaf people and people with disabilities."
(the) handicapped, (the) disabled	person with a disability; people with disabilities	Avoid blanket and outdated terms.	"We support people with disabilities."
afflicted by, suffers from, victim of	has [name of condition]	Avoid implying pain, tragedy, or helplessness.	"She has arthritis."
mentally handicapped, mentally defective, retarded, subnormal	with a learning disability / with learning disabilities	Use respectful, up-to-date terminology.	"He has a learning disability."
cripple, invalid	disabled person	Avoid derogatory, demeaning language.	"She is a disabled person."
spastic	person with cerebral palsy	Avoid outdated and offensive slurs.	"He is a person with cerebral palsy."
able-bodied	non-disabled	Avoid implying disabled people are "less than" or unhealthy.	"This event is for disabled and non-disabled people."
mental patient, insane, mad	person with a mental health condition	Avoid stigmatising language.	"She is a person with a mental health condition."
deaf and dumb; deaf mute	deaf, BSL user, person with a hearing impairment	Avoid inaccurate and offensive terms; being Deaf does not imply lack of speech.	"He is a BSL user."
the blind	people with visual impairments; blind people; blind and partially sighted people	Avoid generalisations and outdated labels.	"We provide support for people with visual impairments."
an epileptic, diabetic, depressive	person with epilepsy/diabetes/depression; someone who has...	A person is not their condition; use person-first language.	"She is a person with diabetes."
disabled toilets/lifts; toilets/lifts for the disabled	accessible toilets/lifts	Avoid suggesting the facilities <i>belong</i> to disabled people; emphasise accessibility.	"There are accessible lifts on every floor."

## Age



Instead of saying	Say instead	Why	Example
the boys/girls in the office	our colleagues in the office	Avoid using the terms “girls” or “boys” when referring to colleagues or employees, as these imply children and can be patronising. Avoid language that stereotypes based on age or gender.	“Our colleagues in the office will join the meeting at 10 am.”
a young and vibrant team / a mature workforce	an experienced team / a diverse team	Avoid ageist terms such as “elderly,” “OAPs,” “pensioners,” or “youngsters.” Focus on skills, experience, or diversity rather than age.	“We have an experienced team handling client account”
the elderly, the old, pensioners	people aged [specific age] / older adults / older people (only if age is relevant)	Only refer to age when it is relevant to the context (e.g., healthcare programs, benefits, research). Avoid blanket age labels.	“Vaccinations are free for adults over 65.”
the young	people aged [specific age] / younger adults (only if age is relevant)	Only mention age when relevant to the discussion. Avoid generalising an entire age group.	“Chlamydia testing is offered free for people under 25.”
—	—	Avoid referring to someone’s age unless it is directly relevant to the context, such as medical screenings, age-specific programs, or legal requirements.	“The under-25s are eligible for free screening tests.”

# Marriage & Civil Partnerships



Do	Don't	Why	Example
Use gender-neutral language: Say "couple," "partners," or "people" instead of "bride and groom," "husband and wife," or other gendered terms.	Assume gender or pronouns: Avoid assuming a couple's gender or using gendered terms unless you are certain of the couple's preference.	Using gender-neutral language ensures all couples, including same-sex or non-binary partnerships, feel included.	"Welcome, everyone, to the ceremony" instead of "Welcome, ladies and gentlemen."
Use person-first language: When referring to someone's characteristic (like disability or religion), put the person first, e.g., "a person with a disability."	Make assumptions about marital status: Don't assume couples are heterosexual; use neutral terms like "partner."	Person-first language focuses on the individual and avoids assumptions about relationships.	"They are a person with a disability" instead of "They are disabled."
Consider cultural sensitivities: Be aware that customs and language vary across cultures and avoid making assumptions about roles in the partnership.	Use outdated or stereotypical terms: Avoid assuming traditional roles like "bride" or "groom" unless preferred.	Respecting cultural and personal preferences avoids offense and promotes inclusivity.	"The couple are exchanging vows" instead of assuming roles based on gender.
Ask for preferences: Where appropriate, find out how couples prefer to be addressed or described, especially regarding pronouns and titles.	Make irrelevant references to personal characteristics: Only mention gender, sexual orientation, or religion when it is directly relevant.	Asking preferences ensures respectful and accurate communication during marriage or civil partnership events.	"Hi Alex and Sam, which pronouns do you prefer?"
Use inclusive greetings: When addressing guests or couples, use words that include everyone, such as "everyone," "guests," or "loved ones."	Generalize or stereotype: Avoid making assumptions about guests or couples based on gender or relationship type.	Inclusive greetings ensure all attendees feel welcomed regardless of gender or relationship status.	"Good morning, everyone" instead of "Good morning, ladies and gentlemen."
Correct mistakes: If you realize you've used non-inclusive language, apologize and make the correction.	Use jargon or complex terms unnecessarily: Keep language simple and clear for all guests.	Correcting mistakes shows respect and helps maintain an inclusive environment during ceremonies and communications.	"I apologize, I should have said 'partners' instead of 'husband and wife.'"

# Pregnancy & Maternity



Do	Don't	Phrases to Avoid	What to say instead
Treat pregnancy as a normal life event, not a limitation	Make assumptions about capability, commitment, or availability	"Are you sure you should be doing this while pregnant?"	"Let us know if there's anything you need to feel comfortable and supported."
Ask what support or adjustments may be helpful, rather than making assumptions	Comment on someone's body, health, or choices	"We'll give that role to someone else — it's a bit much for you."	"We can look at adjustments together — just tell us what works best for you."
Respect privacy — share information only with consent	Suggest pregnancy is an inconvenience to the team	"When are you coming back properly?"	"Your role will be here when you're ready to return."
Offer reasonable adjustments (e.g., rest breaks, seating, lighter duties)	Pressure someone to return early or delay maternity leave	"You don't look pregnant."	"Take the time you need — your health comes first."
Be flexible with appointments, shifts, and return-to-work planning	Treat breastfeeding or expressing milk as inappropriate or inconvenient	"Must be nice to have time off."	"We support you in managing appointments and breastfeeding/expressing at work as needed."