

Inclusive language and behaviour

1. Introduction

- 1.1. As we strive to become an inclusive organisation, we may sometimes worry about causing harm and offence in our communication. This means it can be hard to know to say in work and volunteer situations.
- 1.2. The guidance will help to increase your confidence using acceptable words to describe groups of people protected by the *Equality Act 2010*¹.
- 1.3. Acceptable language may vary globally. In the UK, this may also change over time as the English language and our communities evolve. When in doubt, let individuals / groups of people guide you on their preferred language or terminology.
- 1.4. Characteristics covered:
 - > Age
 - > Disability (including mental health)
 - > Transgender (or gender reassignment)
 - > Marriage or civil partnership
 - > Pregnancy or maternity
 - > Race
 - > Religion or belief
 - > Sex / gender
 - > Sexual orientation
- 1.5. For more information about each characteristic, please see the [Equality 2010 factsheets](#) or contact diversity@redcross.org.uk

2. Age

- 2.1. Language around age can reinforce stereotypes about a person's ability, character, and / or their intelligence. This can lead to prejudice and discrimination, affecting all ages.
- 2.2. Language terminologies to avoid and use instead:

¹ *Equality Act 2010* applies to Great Britain only. Similar anti-discrimination laws exist in Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, and the Channel Islands.

Avoid	Use instead
'Old person', 'Codger', 'Fogey'	'Elderly person' 'Older person' 'Person is ... years old'
'Youngster' 'Baby' 'Kid'	Young person, young man/woman 'Person is ... years old'
'Inexperienced' or 'mature'	'Starting their career' 'Gaining experience' 'Lots of experience/knowledge within...'

2.3. Tips to avoid age discrimination:

- > When designing job descriptions, avoid terms that can discriminate against younger/older applicants. For example, requiring '5 years' experience' without there being any relevance to the role.
- > Try your best to make younger or older colleagues feel valued and accepted within your team, even if there is a significant age gap between you.
- > Don't assume people have more or less experience because of their age. Allow them the opportunity to showcase their skills.

3. Disability

- 3.1. Disability remains largely misunderstood. For example, did you know that hidden disabilities such as dyslexia and mental health conditions are protected under the *Equality Act 2010* and *Disability Discrimination Act 1995*?
- 3.2. The British Red Cross uses the **social model of disability** in our approach to disability inclusion. The model says that people are disabled by society (e.g. lack of accessibility, negative social attitudes towards disability), and not because of an individual's condition or impairment. Therefore, we focus on removing physical and social barriers that prevent disabled people from participating at Red Cross and in wider society.
- 3.3. Some disabled people and activists may not use the social model of disability, or the recommended language outlined in this section to describe themselves and that's okay. Let them guide you on the language they prefer, but remember to be respectful.
- 3.4. For support and advice on disability inclusion, please see [Diversity and accessibility resources](#), or speak to a.
- 3.5. Language:

Avoid	Use instead
'(The) handicapped', '(the) disabled', 'crippled'.	Disabled person or people (plural)
'Afflicted by', 'suffers from', 'victim of...'	Has... {name of condition or impairment}.
'In a wheelchair', 'wheelchair-bound', 'confined to a wheel'.	Wheelchair user.
'Mentally handicapped'.	<p>Person with a...</p> <p>Learning disability (singular) with learning disabilities (plural) (e.g. Down Syndrome, Fragile X Syndrome).</p> <p>or</p> <p>Specific learning impairment / difficulty (singular) with learning impairments / difficulties (plural) (e.g. Dyslexia, Dyspraxia).</p>
'Able-bodied', 'normal', 'healthy'.	Non-disabled.
'Mentally unstable', 'poor mental health'.	<p>Person with a mental health condition.</p> <p>Has ... [name of mental health condition]</p>
'Deaf and dumb', 'deaf mute'.	<p>User of British sign language, person with a hearing impairment</p> <p>Deaf; with a capital D – if you're referring to Deaf culture or the person considers themselves part of the Deaf community</p> <p>deaf; with a lowercase d in sentences – may be used if referring to hearing loss in general</p> <p>Hard of hearing is also acceptable</p>
'The blind'	<p>People with visual impairments</p> <p>Blind and partially sighted people</p>
'Dwarf', 'midget'	Someone with restricted growth or short stature
'An epileptic', 'diabetic', 'depressive', and so on	Person with epilepsy, diabetes, depression or someone who has epilepsy, diabetes, depression, and so

Avoid	Use instead
	on.
Fits, spells, attacks	Seizures
Spastic	Person with cerebral palsy

(Information sourced from the Office for Disability Issues)

4. Transgender

- 4.1. When we think about gender, we often think about the sex that we are assigned at birth. This labels us either male or female, even if our reproductive or sexual anatomy doesn't fit the typical definitions of either (also known as an intersex variation). However, gender is much wider than this and includes a range of other characteristics such as; social structures (e.g. gender roles).
- 4.2. Transgender is an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with the sex that they were assigned to at birth. For example, a person who was assigned female at birth may identify as a transgender man or non-binary (if they do not exclusively identify as a man or woman).
- 4.3. The concept of gender identity is not new but our awareness is, and language which was restricted to LGBT+ communities and academia is now becoming more mainstream. This includes increased use of gender-neutral language that doesn't specify gender or sex (e.g. people, they, everyone etc.).

4.4. Language terminology:

Avoid	Use Instead
'Transgendered', 'Transsexual,'	Trans/transgender/ person, woman or man.
sex change, pre-operative, post-operative. Not everyone who transitions will undergo surgery, so we should avoid unless relevant to the context.	Transition or transitioning
Born a man or woman.	Assigned male or female at birth

Avoid	Use Instead
'It', 'he-she'	Preferred gender pronoun by the individual (e.g. he, she, and they*). *They /their / them are commonly used gender-neutral singular pronouns
Normal (to describe non-trans or non-binary people).	Non-trans or non-transgender Cis or cisgender
Specifying gender, when it isn't relevant to the context: e.g. 'he or she'.	They* *is inclusive of non-binary people, and it flows better in written communication. People who... [e.g. menstruate] * ... [e.g. pregnant] people* *this doesn't mean you should never refer to gender, but consider the purpose of text to decide what is more appropriate. For example, a pregnancy and maternity policy that only specifies pregnant women, will exclude non-binary people and trans men who can also become pregnant. In contrast, communication about inequality facing young women and girls will need to include specific reference to their gender.

(Information adapted from [acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk))

5. Marriage or civil partnership

- 5.1. Language around marriage can discriminate against unmarried and married people, but especially single or unmarried women and couples in same-sex marriages and civil partnerships. This is because they reinforce assumptions that all women are or should be married and that all married couples consist of a man and a woman.
- 5.2. Unless you are certain, we recommend using gender-neutral and titles as they do not indicate marital statuses.,
- 5.3. Language terminology:

Avoid	Use Instead
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<p>‘Miss’ or ‘Mrs’</p> <p>Unless they have indicated this is their preferred title</p>	<p>Ms – alternative title to Miss and Mrs that does not indicate a women’s marital status.</p> <p>Mx – title that does not indicate a person’s gender nor marital status</p>
<p>‘husband’ or ‘wife’</p> <p>Unless you know your colleague is married/in a civil partnership and you also know the preferred pronoun of their spouse.</p>	<p>Partner, spouse</p>

6. Pregnancy or maternity

6.1. As with gender, some comments around pregnancy or maternity can discriminate and cause offence.

6.2. Language and behaviour tips:

- > Use your colleague’s name whenever possible, and avoid reducing them to their pregnancy or maternity unless it is relevant to the context.
- > Pregnancy and maternity affects same-sex couples and trans people too. Be respectful and avoid language that is considered homophobic or transphobic. See language around transgender and sexual orientation.
- > If you’re speaking to a group of colleagues, avoid singling out pregnant people, unless it is relevant to context and they are comfortable with it.
- > Respect that colleagues may feel more comfortable talking about personal issues with a colleague of the same sex.
- > Follow basic procedures available in the [Maternity leave and pay policy and procedure, if you manage staff.](#)

7. Race or ethnicity

7.1. Language around race, ethnicity and national identity can be very loaded and sensitive owing centuries of; national conflict, imperialism, and colonisation.

7.2. When interacting with people of another ethnic, national or racial backgrounds:

- > Remember that you don’t need to refer to people’s racial identity unless it’s in a relevant context.
- > People may have personal preferences on how they define their race, nationality or ethnic background.

- > If someone has a name you find hard to pronounce, try your best to say it correctly. If you're unsure on how to pronounce it, ask them to say it for you, and listen.
- > Don't make assumptions about person personality or experience based on race. This includes making broad statements about racial groups as this can cause offence (e.g. all Asians are clever). Get to know about the individual on a personal level and ask them about their experiences.

7.3. Language:

Avoid	Use instead
<p>'Coloured person'</p> <p>Ethnic minority slang* or derogatory language</p> <p>*unless you identify as an ethnic minority, do not use slang words to describe them. Some words are culturally sensitive or considered derogatory when used by people outside the culture. E.g. slurs that have been reclaimed by some (but not all) ethnic minorities.</p>	<p>BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic), Black British or Black, Asian British or Asian</p> <p>Ethnic minority or world majority</p> <p>By nationality e.g. Nigerian.</p> <p>of [nation] origin.</p>
'Half-caste'	<p>'Mixed race', 'dual heritage' or 'mixed background'</p> <p>You can also state both ethnicities e.g. White and Indian, White and Chinese etc.</p>
Immigrant (when referring to a British-born ethnic minorities).	Of [nation] origin, Black British, British Asian, etc.

8. Religion or belief

8.1. Everyone is entitled to their own beliefs and to follow or not follow a religion.

8.2. Especially as a [neutral and impartial organisation](#), we have to make sure that our language is inclusive and doesn't show preferable treatment to one religious or ethnical stance over another. See [Religious neutrality guidance](#) for more information.

8.3. Language terminology:

Avoid	Use instead
Slang words to describe a person's religion or belief* or derogatory language. *unless you identify with a religion or belief, do not refer to it by slang as it can have negative implications.	Standardised belief or faith. e.g. Christian, atheist, etc.
Asking for a person's 'Christian' name	First name, forename
Church – when referring to non-Christian places of worship	Place of worship

Here are also some tips that can help you understand others' religions/beliefs:

- > Accept that people have different beliefs to you – this doesn't mean that there aren't many similarities between you either.
- > Show empathy and before criticising others' beliefs, look at your own and try to understand why people might have theirs.
- > Be considerate of others' feelings – try your best not to discourage people or judge people because of their beliefs.
- > Be aware of religious observance. For example, perhaps eating lunch or putting food separately for a meeting if a Muslim member of staff is attending and is observing Ramadan. See [Ramadan guidance](#) for more information.
- > Don't try to change others' beliefs or influence their opinion, even if their beliefs are different to yours. People are entitled to believe what they want to.
- > Educate yourself – if you're unsure as to why certain religions hold certain beliefs or celebrate certain occasions, do some research or ask the person. Education is a great tool to in improving diversity and overcoming prejudice.
- > Never assume that everyone has a religious belief, and remember the existence of religious minorities e.g. pagans, etc.

(Info sourced from [wikihow.com](https://www.wikihow.com))

9. Sex / gender

- 9.1. Much of the language we use has evolved from gender-based attitudes and values. For example, you're much more likely to tell someone to 'man up' when you want someone to act tough or brave rather than 'woman up', and call a man a 'sissy' when he acts 'womanly' or doesn't conform to male gender stereotypes.'
- 9.2. The English language is also binary. For instance, we don't have gender-neutral singular pronouns to describe a person. Historically we have used the generic male pronouns such as 'he' however, over time the singular use of

'them' and 'they' has increased with the shift towards using more gender-inclusive language.

9.3. Language terminology:

Avoid	Use Instead
'love' 'darling' 'sweetheart' 'mate' 'bloke'	Colleague's name
Referring to groups of people with gender binary plural pronouns e.g. guys	All, everyone
His, her*	they, them*
*This only to be avoided when speaking generally, and gender specific pronouns are not required for the context.	*when speaking generally and gender specific pronouns are not required e.g. role descriptions.
'it', 'he-she'* *When referring to a transgender or person	Their preferred pronoun (e.g. he, she, they)

9.4. additional tips:

- > Try to use gender-neutral language and avoid giving a task to a certain gender because it is more 'men's/women's work'.
- > Respect that colleagues may feel more comfortable to talk about personal issues with a colleague of the same sex or gender.

10. Sexual orientation

10.1. Even though this shouldn't play a part in how colleagues treat each other, it sometimes can. Remember:

- > Some people might not feel comfortable talking about their sexual orientation at work. We must respect people's right to not disclose their personal information.
- > A person's sexual orientation does not determine their personality. For example, gay men can be stereotyped to behave in a more feminine way but this is a misconception. There is no set way in which a man should behave whatever their sexual orientation.

10.2. Language terminology:

Avoid	Use Instead
'Homosexual' –	Gay

Avoid	Use Instead
<p>LGBT+ slang*</p> <p>*Unless you identify as LGBT+, it's recommended not use slang words to describe an LGBT+ person. Some words are culturally sensitive or considered derogatory when used by non-LGBT+ people. E.g. slurs that have been reclaimed by some (but not all) LGBT+ people.</p>	<p>Gay (man/woman/person), lesbian, bisexual (man/woman/person)</p> <p>LGBT+ communities (Lesbian, Gay Bisexual, Transgender and other sexual orientation and gender minorities)</p>
Gay marriage	Marriage, same-sex marriage, civil partnership
Gay relationship	Relationship, same-sex relationship
Sexual preference, gay / lesbian lifestyle	Sexual orientation
Admittedly gay, etc, out of the closet.	Openly gay / lesbian / bi etc.

10.3. When speaking to someone who is in a civil partnership, if you're not sure whether to use 'husband' or 'wife', 'partner' is a neutral term to use as an alternative.

10.4. Further guidance is outlined in the [A-Z guide for supporting LGB+ inclusion](#).

11. Contact Us

11.1. If you need advice or just want to talk to someone please reach out!

The diversity team	Email: diversity@redcross.org.uk
Networks	<p>Our Red Cross networks allow our people with shared experiences, and allies to network across the organisation, and share their experiences. We currently have the following networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) > disability > LGBT+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Plus) > Gender equality network <p>To join, please visit RedRoom's team-site directory</p>

12. Review and maintenance

12.1 This guidance was last reviewed by the diversity team in September 2019.

12.2 It is next due to be reviewed in January 2021.

12.3 Related documents:

Related documents			
Document title	Policy	Procedure	Guidance
Equality and diversity policy	✓		
Grievance policy and procedure	✓	✓	
Harassment and bullying policy	✓		
Volunteer complaints, issues and concerns policy (CIC)	✓		