



The BHS' Inclusive
Language Guidance

September 2022

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Introduction

Language is a powerful tool for creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, however we all know how it feels when words make us feel left out, dismissed, or undervalued. Here at the BHS, we want to create a culture of inclusion, which means maintaining positive and respectful communication with our peers who may not have the same characteristics as us.

To help us on our diversity and inclusion journey, we created this guide to help you become more confident and intentional in the way you use your language, so that all BHS Home and One Team can remain as inclusive as possible. The inclusive language terms are recommended, if ever you are unsure, it is always best to ask how someone would like to be referred to. There is a glossary of terms at the end of the document.

Aims of the BHS Equality Policy

The BHS recognises that every person is an individual with different needs, preferences and abilities. We aim to reflect this diversity in everything we do, including making our services inclusive and accessible to people from all sections of the community, and attracting and retaining a diverse workforce. The BHS believes in harnessing different life experiences, attributes and contributions from our Home and One Team. This will make the BHS a more effective and inclusive organisation and a better place to work.

The BHS aims to ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities to take part in equestrian activities irrespective of age, sex, gender identity, disability, race, ethnic origin, nationality, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, religion, social background or, sexual orientation.

Why is inclusivity important?

An organisation cannot benefit from a diverse workforce without an environment that is inclusive and encourages people to bring a variety of experiences, ideas, and perspectives to the workplace. Inclusivity encourages everyone to be their authentic selves without fear of discrimination.

Inclusivity – and inclusive language in particular – recognises that words matter and that word choice can be used, intentionally or unintentionally, to include or exclude others. Using inclusive language communicates with people in a way that is respectful and brings everyone into the conversation.

Unknowingly, we carry our own implicit biases with us every day, even as we make casual conversation. Learning how to have conversations that avoid exclusive language means fighting hardened habits and biases you likely don't always recognise that you carry.

What is inclusive language?

Inclusive language is any type of communication that proactively uses words, phrases and expressions that are welcoming, and where possible, avoiding assumptions and stereotypes that may exclude or demean people.

For example, gendered language is largely understood as a language that has a bias towards a particular sex or social gender, and terms like businessman, fireman or fisherman would not be considered inclusive.

Inclusive language can take place in person, but also over text, email, social media, and even in some imagery. The use of language can have varying effects and we acknowledge not everyone understands the words or phrases that are considered hurtful or offensive, which is why it is important to make yourself aware of current terms being used.

Discrimination through language, whether intentional or otherwise, can cause offence, patronise, or in some cases even be unlawful. It is important to use language that includes everyone, and be prepared to adapt and change it as and when our understanding evolves.

As well as having empathy and compassion for others, we need to extend it to ourselves, too. Changing personal habits requires patience, so we ask that you are not too hard on yourself as you learn and adapt. If you make a mistake along the way, acknowledge it, apologise, replace what you said with inclusive language, and move on. It is important not to over-apologise or dwell on a mistake or slip-up; just be mindful of how you navigate your language moving forward. **If you don't know, ask, learn and pass on.**

We ask you to be a good ally and role model by showing, through the language you use and the choices you make, that you understand the power and impact that words have.

This guide aims to help you navigate inclusive language more confidently. We care about your safety and wellbeing, so if you have witnessed or experienced any discriminatory behaviour, or are concerned about the language someone has displayed, please speak to a member of the People Team, or email the EDI & Safeguarding Manager on edi@bhs.org.uk.

The Protected Characteristics

The Equality Act 2010 introduced the concept of protected characteristics and the requirement for employers and organisations to prevent discrimination against these groups. Below we have summarised the groups where language can sometimes cause issue or confusion.

It is important to **remember that language changes and evolves over time**, and therefore this guide is not exhaustive or definitive. We will, however, endeavour to update this guide regularly to reflect any changes so that you have the most up to date knowledge to hand as possible.

Age

Inappropriate language around age is an issue for older and younger people alike. It is ingrained in our everyday vocabulary and is often overlooked. You should always avoid using language that implies a particular age group is more or less able.

Guidelines to consider:

- When writing job descriptions, focus on a person's skills and capabilities, rather than their experience or age.
- Only refer to someone's age if it is relevant, for example where courses, activities, or funding are only available for a particular age group.
- Do not use age to describe an individual or group where it isn't relevant, e.g., a 'mature workforce' or 'young and vibrant team'. Instead, it is more appropriate to say something like 'experienced workforce' or 'effective and vibrant team'.

Inclusive Terms	Not Inclusive Terms
Older Person/People	The Elderly, Old Man/Woman
Older Person/People	OAPs / Pensioners
Child/Children and Young Person/People	Kids / Youngsters / Youths
An effective and diverse team	A young and diverse team

Proven experience is required	10 years' experience is required
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Disability

There are an estimated 14.1 million disabled people in the UK, 8% of children are disabled, 19% of working age adults are disabled and 46% of pension age adults are disabled (Source: Family Resources Survey 2019-20).

We subscribe to the social model of disability, which says that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or difference. Removing these barriers creates equality and offers disabled people more independence, choice and control.

The term 'disabled' is an adjective to act as a descriptor, but not to address a group of people. For example, you would refer to them as 'disabled people' or 'people with disabilities' but not 'the disabled' as a collective term. However, avoid referring to 'disabled people' in all communications as many people who need disability benefits or services don't identify with this term - consider using terms like 'people with health conditions or impairments' instead.

Guidelines to consider:

- In general, you should aim to use person-centred language, e.g. 'a man who is blind' instead of 'a blind man'.
- However, many deaf people whose first language is BSL (British Sign Language) consider themselves part of 'the deaf community' – so they may describe themselves as 'Deaf', with a capital D, to emphasise their deaf identity. If ever you are unsure, it is always best to ask how they would like to be referred.
- Avoid phrases like 'suffers from' or 'victim of', which suggest discomfort, constant pain or a sense of hopelessness.
- Always address and speak to a disabled person directly, even if they have an interpreter or companion with them.
- When describing adaptive equipment, avoid using language where it is described as a limitation, e.g. 'wheelchair user' instead of 'wheelchair bound'.
- Common phrases that may associate impairments with negative things should be avoided, e.g. 'blind drunk' or 'fallen on deaf ears'.

Inclusive Terms	Not Inclusive Terms
People with disabilities / People with health conditions or impairments	The disabled /The handicapped
Non-disabled / People without disabilities	Normal people / healthy people / able-bodied
People with visual impairments / People who are blind / Partially sighted people	The blind
User of BSL / People with hearing impairments	Deaf and dumb / Deaf mute
Disabled person	Cripple / Invalid / Spastic
Wheelchair user	Wheelchair bound / Confided to a wheelchair
Seizures	Fits / Attacks / Spells
Accessible car park	Disabled car park

Mental Health

Everyone has mental health, and the way we experience it is unique to each of us. In the UK, 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem of some kind in their lifetime, and as many as 1 in 6 people report

experiencing a common mental health problem (like anxiety and depression) in any given week (source: Mind).

With so many people experiencing common mental health challenges, and conversations around mental health becoming more common, being mindful and respectful in our language surrounding it can have a positive impact on all of us.

Guidelines to consider:

- Many people who live with conditions such as depression or anxiety have difficulty performing otherwise ‘regular’ everyday tasks or keeping appointments. Therefore, it is important not to make assumptions about others or immediately label people as ‘lazy’ or ‘unreliable’.
- Two people with the same clinical diagnosis can present very differently. Be respectful of people’s individual experiences, and where possible, use language that acknowledges not all mental illnesses are the same.
- There is no clear definition of what ‘normal’ is. Avoid using this term as it can cause others to feel defensive if their experience doesn’t fit into the category of ‘normal.’ Using terms like ‘usual’ or ‘typical’ is much less critical.
- Those who struggle with the misuse of drugs or alcohol aren’t choosing to ‘abuse’ a substance. There are often neurobiological factors and emotional health issues which lead to this behaviour. Calling it a ‘substance use disorder’ instead accepts these other factors and removes the blame.
- Don’t use phrases or expressions like “they are so OCD” to describe someone who is neat or “they are so bipolar / manic” for some who behave unpredictably. These are problematic as they minimise the debilitating issues experienced by people with a clinical diagnosis, and dismisses these behaviours as passing feelings or urges, rather than valid medical conditions.

Inclusive Terms	Not Inclusive Terms
A person with mental health conditions/issues	Mental patient / Insane / Crazy / Psycho
Living with a mental illness	Afflicted by mental illness / Suffers from mental illness / Victim of mental illness
Usual / Typical behaviour	Normal behaviour
Substance abuse disorder	Substance abuse / Druggie / Junkie
Mental health problems	Mental disorder
A person with depression / anxiety	Struggles or suffers with depression / anxiety

Neurodiversity

The word ‘neurodiversity’ describes the idea that no two brains are exactly alike, and that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways. More specifically, neurodiversity is often used in the context of the autism spectrum, as well as other neurological or developmental conditions such as ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), dyslexia, and learning disabilities.

It is estimated that around one in seven people (more than 15%) of people in the UK are neurodivergent (Source: Local Government Association 2020). Appreciating these differences in communication skills, problem-solving and creative insights emphasises the importance of not using negative language in relation to neurodiversity.

Guidelines to consider:

- As outlined in the Mental Health section, avoid using terms like ‘normal’ to describe people who are not neurodiverse, as this alienates people whose experiences don’t fit into what is considered ‘normal.’

- Take notice of how people like to refer themselves. Rather than making assumptions, you can enquire discreetly about a person’s preferred language and how they want to be addressed. Generally, you should aim for person-first language, as explained in the Disability section.
- When referring to people with autism, avoid using terms like ‘high-functioning’ or ‘low-functioning’, as this implies certain people function ‘better’ than others, which in turn heavily stigmatises or dismisses certain individuals.
- To make your environment and social situations more neurodiversity-friendly, use a clear communication style (e.g. avoiding sarcasm, euphemisms, and implied messages) and provide concise verbal and written instructions for tasks.
- Don’t assume someone is deliberately breaking the rules or being rude, and respectfully inform someone about workplace/social etiquette where required.

Inclusive Terms	Not Inclusive Terms
Neurodiverse	Not normal
Neurotypical	Normal people
Autism spectrum	Autism Spectrum Disorder (<i>referring to the Autism Spectrum is acceptable, but adding ‘Disorder’ is generally considered offensive to autistic people</i>)
Person with autism	Autistic
Person with dyslexia	Dyslexic

Race and Ethnicity

Race and ethnicity can sometimes be confused as the same thing, as both are social constructs used to categorise and characterise individuals and communities. While there can be overlap between the two terms, it is helpful to understand the difference and how this impacts inclusive language.

‘Race’ is used to describe shared physical traits, particularly skin colour, facial features and hair texture, and a shared ancestry, historical and cultural experience as a result.

‘Ethnicity’ is a term that recognises differences between people mostly on the basis of language, shared culture, national identity, and religious expression.

Guidelines to consider:

- Do not make assumptions about someone’s place origin based on their appearance.
- ‘BAME’ and ‘BME’ (acronyms to describe Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic people) are terms that are considered problematic, because it assumes that all non-White people exist as a homogeneous group without appreciation of the uniqueness of individual ethnicities. Depending on context, we suggest instead using terms like ‘people of colour’ or ‘people who are ethnically and culturally diverse’.
- When broadly referring to race in written communication, use ‘black’, ‘Asian’, or ‘white’ (rather than Caucasian), written with the first letter capitalised.
- Where appropriate, ask how a person identifies, as different people will be comfortable with different term (e.g. ‘Black’ vs ‘Black-British’)
- Actively avoid use of, but challenge, racial and ethnic slurs, as well as any language that encourages stereotyping based on racial or ethnic associations.

Inclusive Terms	Not Inclusive Terms
Block list, safe list, allow list, deny list	Blacklisted, Whitelists
Underrepresented groups	Minorities
Mixed race / Biracial / Multiracial	Half-caste / Exotic
People from overseas	Foreigners

Black people, Asian people, White people	(The) Blacks, Asians, Whites
Black people, Asian people, People of colour	BAME / BME

Pregnancy, Maternity, and Parents

In today's more modern and accepting society, there is no such thing as a 'traditional' family unit. Many families comprise of same sex parents, single parents, or heterosexual couples where the mother is the primary earner and the father takes on the majority of the childcare. Common assumptions and stereotypes can, and often do, have the effect of seriously disadvantaging people.

Guidelines to consider:

- Avoid making assumptions or stereotypes of someone's family unit, whether traditional or otherwise.
- Using terms such as 'pregnant people' can include nonbinary or gender non-conforming people, transgender men, and intersex people, however it is a current topic of debate and some women can feel excluded, so you could choose to use pregnant women and/or people. As always best to ask.
- Avoid remarks such as 'baby brain' if someone is forgetful during pregnancy, or referring to someone's part-time working hours in a negative way.
- Avoid comments referring to parental leave as a 'holiday'.
- Remember that being away from work and becoming a new parent is challenging, and employees may want to continue to feel engaged and included whilst on parental leave.
- Avoid excluding pregnant women and/or people from future-focussed work discussions on the basis that 'they won't be here when it happens/they'll be on maternity leave

Inclusive Terms	Less Inclusive Terms*
Parents	Mother / Father
Parenting	Mothering / Fathering
Parents / Guardians / Caregivers	Mums / Dads
Parental leave	Maternity leave / Paternity leave

*The options on the left side of the table are more inclusive than those on the right, but that doesn't mean the terms on the right have any negative connotations.

Social Inclusion

The key elements of promoting social inclusion include helping socially excluded people and communities overcome inequality and disadvantage, and instead promoting equal opportunities. Enabling people or communities to fully participate in sport is an important part of social inclusion.

People are often socially excluded on the basis of the circumstances they were born into or have individually found themselves in. They may be excluded based on their social identity, which can come from their location, citizenship status, education, employment status, religion, gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, among other factors.

Guidelines to consider:

- Always have compassion for people, as you don't know the full extent of their individual circumstances.

- Avoid language that suggests the person is a problem rather than the situation they are in e.g. ‘person with drug issues’ rather than ‘druggie’ or ‘person experiencing poverty and/or homelessness’ instead of ‘destitute’.
- Be kind and patient to those where English is not their first language, do not make fun of accents or grammatic errors, and politely ask them to repeat themselves if you don’t understand what they said the first time.
- Generally, do not refer to other people’s religions unless it is relevant to information being communicated.

Inclusive Terms	Not Inclusive Terms
Socioeconomic status	Class
Unemployed	Jobless / Layabout
Under-resourced	Disadvantaged
Low-opportunity communities / Communities with high poverty rates / Communities with access to fewer opportunities	‘Hard-to-reach communities’
First name / Given name	Christian name
Religion / Belief	
Christian people, Jewish people, Muslim people, Hindu people	Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus
Substance abuse disorder	Abusing substances / druggie / junkie
People experiencing homelessness	(The) homeless
Survivors	Victims
‘People facing barriers’	‘People struggling’
‘I look messy / untidy’	‘I look homeless / like a tramp’

Sex and Gender

Gender and sexual identity language is embedded in our everyday language and, if not used carefully, can erase or diminish the identity of others.

The Equality Act defines sex as “A man or a woman” as defined by biological sex. We understand that legally, our duty is to consider the protected characteristic of “sex”, so when referring to the protected characteristics of the 2010 Equality Act we use ‘sex’ rather than ‘gender.’ However, in other contexts we encourage the use of “gender” in place of “sex” because it is more inclusive of those who are intersex, non binary and transgender people.

The acronym LGBTQ+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people, with the “+” sign to recognise the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities that encompasses the community, such as pansexual, asexual, or intersex.

In terms of gender identity, you are probably familiar with pronouns such as “she/her/hers” to refer to women and “he/him/his” to refer to men. There are gender-neutral pronouns “they/them/theirs” that accommodate people who do not identify within the binary.

Guidelines to consider:

- Someone’s gender expression may not be the same as their gender identity or relate to their sexual orientation. For example, a man may wear nail polish or a dress and not identify as gay or non-binary, just like a woman may have short hair or dress more masculine and not identify as a lesbian or transgender. It is important to respect people’s gender expression while not making assumptions on how they choose to identify.
- If unsure of someone’s pronouns use, it is usually best to default to ‘they/them’ or just using their name. It is okay to respectfully and discreetly ask someone which gender pronouns they identify with. For example, “Hi I’m Rachel and I use she/her/hers pronouns. What are your pronouns?”

- Gendered terms like ‘policeman’ or ‘fireman’ implies the occupations are exclusivity male, so instead should be replaced with ‘police officer’ or ‘firefighter’. Similarly, avoid pointing out a professional’s gender, for example saying ‘female doctor’ or ‘male nurse’, and instead just using ‘doctor’ or ‘nurse’.
- Avoid gender-biased expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes, e.g. ‘man up’, ‘that’s a woman’s job’, ‘cry like a girl’.

Inclusive Terms	Not Inclusive Terms
Hi All / Everyone / Folks / Team / Friends	Hi Girls / Guys / Ladies / Gentlemen
A person’s given name	Girl / Son / Mate /Love
Partners / Spouses	Boyfriend / Girlfriend / Husband / Wife
Person / People / Individuals	Man / Woman / Men / Women
Nibbling	Niece / Nephew
Chair / Chairperson	Chairman
People / Humankind	Mankind
Toughen up	Man up
Best person for the job	Best man for the job
Quality of work	Workmanship
Resources	Manpower

Sexuality

Sexuality refers to who people are intimately attracted to. It can range from opposite-sex attracted (heterosexual or straight), same-sex attracted (gay, lesbian), attracted to all genders (bisexual, pansexual), or attracted to none (asexual, aromantic). Each of these are a spectrum, and we all fit somewhere along the spectrum. It is important to note that each of these characteristics are separate and unlinked – a person’s biological sex does not determine their gender identity.

Guidelines to consider:

- Since the term ‘queer’ has a long history of being used as a slur, it is generally best not use it as a descriptor. Although the term has now been largely reclaimed by LGBTQ+ people and is a widely used in the community, avoid using the term ‘queer’ to describe someone unless they have explicitly told you that is how they identify.

Inclusive Terms	Not Inclusive Terms
Sexual Orientation / Sexuality	Sexual preference
Gender Identity	Decided to be a man / woman / non-binary
A cis person / A cisgender person	‘Normal’ / Not trans
A trans person / A transgender person	Tranny / Transvestite
Transitioning / Transitioned	Sex change
Gay / Lesbian / Bisexual / Pansexual	Homos / Homosexuals
Assigned Male at Birth (AMAB) Assigned Female at Birth (AFAB)	Born a man/woman or biological man/woman

Glossary of Terms

Ableism Discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities.

Allies Someone who does not experience the same structural oppressions as their peers, but actively supports them and fights their corner.

Anti-Semitism Hostility toward or discrimination against Jewish people as a religious or ethnic group.

Assimilation When a person hides or minimizes parts of their identity to blend into the culture of a workplace or industry.

Black Lives Matter (BLM) an international social movement, formed in the United States in 2013, dedicated to fighting racism and anti-Black violence.

Classism Prejudice or discrimination against people belonging to a particular social class. It usually includes individual attitudes, behaviors, systems of policies or practices that are set up to benefit upper classes at the expense of lower classes.

Colourism Prejudice against people who have a darker skin tone, and/or the preferential treatment of those who are of the same race but lighter-skinned.

Equity Giving everyone what they need to be successful, compared to equality where everyone is treated the same.

Intersectionality An approach largely advanced by women of colour, arguing that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals' lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive. It was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989.

Islamophobia Fear, hatred of, or prejudice against Islam or Muslim people.

Microaggression Indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalised group, in the form of statements, behaviours or incidents.

Neurodiverse Refers to variations in the human brain regarding sociability, learning, attention, mood and other mental functions that are seen as atypical to the general population. For example, neurodiverse individuals can include those with autism, ADHD, dyslexia, or developmental co-ordination disorder (also known as dyspraxia).

Neurotypical Refers to individuals whose brains develop and function in ways that are considered usual or expected by society. They do not experience developmental disorders that impact communication, motor skills, behavior, social cues, or learning abilities.

Nibbling a gender-neutral term to refer to the child or children of your siblings.

Privilege A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group. For example, White people are considered to have more privilege in society compared to Black people, Asian people, and other people of colour due to historical and systemic contexts.

Systemic Meaning of, or relating to, a system. It is often used discussing something that affects a system as a whole, like governments or businesses. For example, a systemic problem is a disagreement between political parties or departments that affects an entity's ability to function properly.

Xenophobia fear, hatred of or prejudice against people from other countries and cultures.

Glossary of Terms – LGBTQ+

Asexual The lack of a sexual attraction for other people.

Aromantic The lack of romantic desire for other people.

Biphobia Prejudice, fear or hatred directed toward bisexual people.

Bisexual A person emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree.

Cisgender A term used to describe a person whose gender identity typically aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth. For example, someone who identifies as a woman and was assigned female at birth is a cisgender woman. The term cisgender is the opposite of the word transgender.

Closeted Describes a LGBTQ+ person who has not disclosed their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming out The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates their sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

Gay A person who is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to members of the same gender.

Gender-fluid A person who does not identify with a single fixed gender; of or relating to a person having or expressing a fluid gender identity.

Genderqueer People who typically reject notions of static categories of gender and embrace a fluidity of gender identity and often (though not always) sexual orientation. People who identify as 'genderqueer' may see themselves as being both male and female, neither male nor female or as falling completely outside these categories.

Homophobia The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who are attracted to members of the same sex.

Intersex An umbrella term describing people born with reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or a chromosome pattern that can't be classified as typically male or female. Those variations are also sometimes referred to as Differences of Sex Development (DSD). Avoid the outdated and derogatory term 'hermaphrodite'.

LGBT / LGBT+ / LGBTQ+ / LGBTQIA+ Acronyms for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual.

Non-binary An adjective describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Non-binary people may identify as being both a man and a woman, somewhere in between, or as falling completely outside of these categories. While many also identify as transgender, not all non-binary people do.

Outing Exposing someone's lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender identity to others without their permission. Outing someone can have serious repercussions on employment, economic stability, personal safety, religious or family situations.

Pansexual Describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to people of any gender, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree.

Queer A term people often use to express fluid identities and orientations, and an umbrella term used to include all identities within the LGBTQ+ community. Note that this term is perceived by some as offensive, so should be used carefully.

Questioning A term used to describe people who are in the process of exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Transsexual A person who physically transitions from male to female or vice versa.

Transgender A person who identifies differently from their biological sex. For example, a transgender person who is biologically female may feel that a male identity is a better fit and use male pronouns instead of female pronouns or/and dress as a man. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.

Transphobia The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, transgender people.

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