

Inclusive Language Guide

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This Guide is a living document and will be updated to reflect evolving language preferences.

Acknowledgements

This Inclusive Language Guide was developed after a review of inclusive language guides from across Canada. Some examples of the resources used to develop this Guide include:

- British Columbia's Public Service Agency's [Words Matter](#)
- City of Oshawa's [Inclusive Language Manual](#)
- Durham District School Board's [Guidelines for Inclusive Language](#)

- Humber College’s [Inclusive Language in Media](#)
- Town of Whitby’s Inclusive Language Guide
- University of Victoria’s [The Edge Brand Guidelines](#)

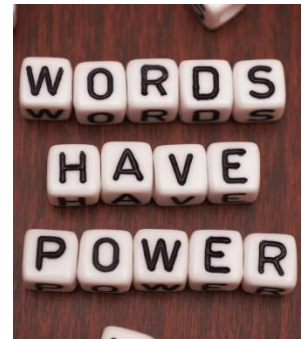
We want to extend our thanks to members of the York Region Municipal Diversity and Inclusion Group (MDIG) for their role in shaping, reviewing and providing feedback throughout the development of this Guide and encouraging its use throughout our workplaces and communities. Similarly, we thank all York Region subject matter experts for reviewing this Guide.

Introduction: Setting the Context

Purpose

What is this Guide for?

Building and maintaining welcoming and inclusive communities and environments where everyone feels like they belong is a responsibility we all have. This Inclusive Language Guide was developed to support the use of inclusive language, in writing and in conversation. Inclusive language refers to communication that is free of prejudicial terms, names or phrases. It does not include stereotypical or discriminatory ideas or views of people/groups and is respectful of different backgrounds, languages, ethnicities, religions, ages, abilities and other defining identities.



What is this Guide not for?

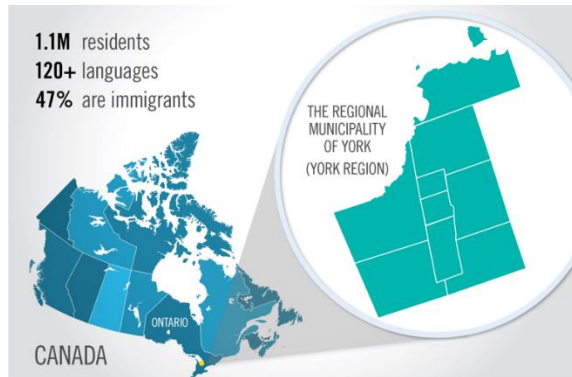
This Guide is **not** a policy or procedure manual. It contains best practice recommendations **only**. Since language is constantly evolving and language preferences are unique to an individual, readers must use their best judgement when applying the practices recommended in this Guide. Readers may also have to adjust their language from situation to situation.

Why did York Region develop this Guide?

The Regional Municipality of York developed this Guide to curate the opinions and recommendations of trusted sources into one reliable document. During development, subject matter experts were consulted. Consideration for the local context of York Region’s growing communities also influenced the information included in this Guide. York Region residents can use the trusted best practices collected in this Guide to navigate inclusion challenges and questions at work, school and home.

Beliefs and best practice recommendations about inclusive language have evolved rapidly in recent years. What was considered a best practice two years ago may be now considered outdated. At times, there can be conflicting information on what is considered a best practice, and the reliability of sources can vary. As such, this Guide will be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

Regional Diversity



York Region is one of the fastest growing and most diverse communities in Canada. As of 2016, [1.1 million people call York Region home](#), speaking over [120 different languages](#) and coming from over [230 distinct ethnic origins](#), with approximately [49% of residents identifying themselves as a visible minority](#) and [47% of residents born outside of Canada](#). Data from 2017 also indicates that [nearly one in five York Region residents \(age 15 and over\) had at least one disability](#). As the population of York Region grows, so will its diversity.

The growing diversity of York Region as a community makes the use of inclusive language increasingly important.

Fostering a strong sense of belonging has also been shown to have physical and mental health benefits. It has, for example, been found to serve as a protective factor when managing stress (Mayo Clinic, 2019). When we feel we have support and are not alone, we may cope more effectively with difficult times in our lives. Using inclusive language can have a significant impact on a person's sense of belonging.

Collective Action to Develop the Guide

This Inclusive Language Guide was developed by York Region, in close coordination with MDIG and is one of many actions resulting from the [Inclusion Charter for York Region](#).

The Inclusion Charter for York Region outlines a common commitment to welcoming and inclusive communities and was developed and endorsed by all MDIG member organizations. Co-Chaired by York Region and York Regional Police, MDIG includes representatives from all nine of York Region's cities and towns, police services, hospitals, school boards and conservation authorities. MDIG includes 20 member organizations, consisting of all nine local municipalities, police services, hospitals, school boards, conservation authorities and agencies.



This Guide represents a collective action of MDIG and supports MDIG's common commitment to inclusion. MDIG organizations are also developing a **collective action plan** to foster inclusion by addressing two priority areas: increasing the sense of community belonging amongst York Region residents and decreasing the incidence of hate crimes. Learn more about the Inclusion Charter and MDIG by reading the annual Inclusion Charter Progress Reports available online at york.ca/inclusiveyr

Inclusive Language and the Ontario Human Rights Code

This Guide supports compliance with the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#), which provides protection from discrimination in five areas of our lives. It states every person has a right to freedom from discrimination in the following social areas: accommodation (housing), contracts, employment, goods, services and facilities and membership in unions, trade or professional associations. The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) recognizes discrimination occurs most often because of a person's membership in a particular

group in society. In the five social areas above, the Code protects people based on the following grounds: age, ancestry, colour, race, citizenship, ethnic origin, place of origin, creed, disability, family status, marital status (including single status), gender identity, gender expression, receipt of public assistance (in housing only), record of offences (in employment only), sex (including pregnancy and breastfeeding) and sexual orientation.

How the Guide is Organized

This Guide covers various inclusive language topics and is organized in two sections:

- **Section 1** provides **guiding principles** to follow when making language inclusive. This includes what to practice, what to ask yourself and what to be aware of
- **Section 2** provides inclusive language guidance around specific topics (identities, social categories) by applying the **guiding principles** and recommending **preferred terms** (names, phrases, terms).

CONTENT WARNING

This Guide contains words and terms that are considered offensive and discriminatory. The examples of problematic terms are not exhaustive and there are other problematic terms that are not listed in this Guide. These words and terms are included to demonstrate what should **not** be communicated. Readers should be aware that these words and terms may cause emotional distress; they are encouraged to take steps to support their emotional well-being, including discontinuing use of the Guide, if necessary.

Section 1: Guiding Principles

The following are general principles to keep in mind when using inclusive language.

Practice this

- **Put people first:** When practicing inclusive language, remember to put the *individual* first. This means referring to them by their name or preferred title rather than by a social group or characteristic. For example, when referring to persons with disabilities, use their name or say “a person with a disability” rather than “disabled person”
- **Avoid generalizations and stereotypes:** Do not make statements or assumptions about any social group. This would include statements or generalizations about gender, culture, ancestry, race, age, ability/disability or any other categories
- **Avoid making distinctions based on physical attributes:** Avoid making any comments about an individual’s physical attributes unless these are necessary in the context of the statement
- **Adopt an open and empathetic mindset:** Be open to changing your language habits and adopting a mindset that is empathetic towards people who have experienced marginalization and discrimination through language
- **Be self-aware and seek education:** Consider the words and expressions you use in conversation and writing and identify if you use any problematic phrases or terms. Learn about

the origins of problematic terms to understand why they are not inclusive. If you recognize any problematic terms, look for more inclusive alternatives

Ask yourself this

- **Does the individual or group have preferred terms?** Some individuals have preferred terms for themselves. If you do not know what someone’s preferred terms are, do not make assumptions; ask them. Keep in mind that individuals who identify with the same social group may have different preferred terms. Always be sensitive to these differences and respect what the individual prefers.
- **Does the language you use reflect the diversity of the intended audience?** Be aware of the language choices you are making and whether there are any terms you are using that exclude certain groups or people in your audience.
- **Is it necessary to refer to a person’s gender, culture, ethnicity, age, etc.?** It is easier to be inclusive if you refrain from referencing gender, culture ethnicity, age and other identities and social categories. Look for substitutions or ways around referencing these identities.
- **Are you staying open and empathetic, and encouraging others to do the same?** Engage in frequent self-reflection to check if you are maintaining an open and empathetic mindset. Try to frequently remind yourself, and others, of the importance of inclusive language and how it can impact more marginalized groups.

Be aware of this

- **Metaphors and phrases can have offensive origins:** The English language is full of metaphors and phrases that have problematic origins. The use of these metaphors may reinforce stereotypes, generalizations and biases about people and groups, even if there is no conscious intention to cause harm. Likewise, cultural metaphors and comparisons often misrepresent cultural practices and may originate from a time when particular cultures and ethnicities were oppressed. The use of metaphors that originated during a time marked by racism and oppression can be retraumatizing. Metaphors that contain a reference to a particular group, a historic practice that affected a group, or cultural practice/symbol, should be avoided.

Examples of metaphors/phrases to avoid

Metaphor or phrase	Meaning	Avoid because...
“Welshing on a bet”	To swindle a person by not paying a debt.	Reinforces stereotypes about people of Welsh heritage.
“Being gypped”	To be cheated or conned.	Reinforces stereotypes about people of Romani heritage.
“Low man on the totem pole”	If you describe someone with this phrase, you mean that they are the least important person in an organization or a group.	May be offensive to Indigenous peoples due to the inappropriate reference to a significant cultural symbol.
“Turning a deaf ear” or “turning a blind eye”	To ignore something observed or overheard that is ethically questionable.	Reinforces negative connotations around various physical disabilities.

Metaphor or phrase	Meaning	Avoid because...
Having a “pow-wow”	To have a quick meeting to resolve something.	May be offensive to Indigenous peoples due to the inappropriate reference to a significant cultural practice.
“Sold down the river”	Used to signify an act of betrayal or compromised trust.	<p>This term originates from the early 19th century colonial slave trade in the United States. The “river” is a literal reference to the Mississippi or Ohio rivers and “to be sold down the river” refers to when Black slaves from more northern regions would be sold in Louisville, Kentucky, a slave-trading marketplace. Being “sold down the river” became synonymous with being subjected to brutally hard labour.</p> <p>This term is offensive to racialized groups due to its origins.</p>
“Master bedroom”	The largest bedroom in a house.	<p>The origins of the term are thought to come from when there were “masters” of the house. Master is another word for slave owner.</p> <p>This term is offensive to racialized groups due to its origins.</p> <p>The Canadian Real Estate Association switched to using term “primary bedroom”.</p>
“Whitelist” or “Blacklist”	<p>In general terms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A whitelist refers to a list of people or things considered acceptable or trustworthy • A blacklist refers to a list of people or things considered unacceptable or untrustworthy, or that should be excluded or avoided <p>When in reference to computer technology:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whitelist refers to a list of programs, email 	<p>The association between “white” and “black” with “acceptable” and “unacceptable”, respectively, is offensive to racialized groups due to its perpetuation of the bias that black is “bad.”</p> <p>The terms “safe/unsafe list” or “allow/deny list” have been used as alternatives.</p>

Metaphor or phrase	Meaning	Avoid because...
	<p>addresses, applications or IP addresses that are considered, by default, safe</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blacklist refers to a list of programs, email addresses, applications or IP addresses that are considered, by default, unsafe 	
<p>“Open the Kimono”</p>	<p>To reveal what is being planned or to share important information freely.</p> <p>In the business context, it means to open a company up to closer examination and to reveal its inner workings.</p>	<p>“Open the Kimono” arose in American business jargon during the 1980’s. The phrase is not in wide use in Japan today. In feudal times the Kimono was opened to show that the wearer was unarmed.</p> <p>“Open the Kimono” is a sexist term in that it relies on stereotypes of women revealing their bodies at the direction of men.</p> <p>The terms “open the books” or “raise the curtain” have been used as alternatives.</p>
<p>“Peanut Gallery”</p>	<p>A group of people who criticize something or someone, often by only focusing on insignificant details.</p>	<p>Originates from Vaudeville, which flourished in North America from around 1880 to the 1930’s. The “Peanut Gallery” referred to the cheapest seats in the theatre. These theatres were often segregated, and the “Peanut Gallery” mostly consisted of Black audience members.</p> <p>This term is offensive to racialized groups due to its origins.</p>
<p>“Grandfathered in”</p>	<p>A provision within a new law or regulation that exempts certain people or entities from following that law. Those with “grandfathered in” status may continue to behave as before, while everyone else must follow the new law.</p>	<p>This term originated following the passage of the 15th Amendment to the US Constitution, which prohibited discrimination in elections based on race.</p>

Metaphor or phrase	Meaning	Avoid because...
		<p>In reaction to the 15th Amendment, several states implemented voting requirements designed to keep Black citizens from voting (such as literacy requirements, poll taxes and constitutional quizzes). However, these requirements put many white voters at risk of losing their rights because they could not meet such expectations.</p> <p>The solution many States used to continue to suppress the Black vote was to maintain the voting rights of citizens who could vote before the Black community was enfranchised (almost all of whom were white), plus their lineal descendants. Extending the right to vote through lineage established the use of the term “grandfathering in.”</p> <p>This term could be offensive to racialized groups due to its origins.</p>
“Going Postal”	The phrase refers to an employee or ex-employee becoming extremely and uncontrollably angry in a workplace environment, often resorting to violence or aggression towards fellow employees or supervisors.	<p>The expression arose in response to a series of violent events at United States Postal Service facilities from 1970 to date, particularly from 1986 to 1993.</p> <p>Generally, using the phrase is not advised as it makes light of injury and death. It has also been used negatively in connection with potential mental health illnesses</p>

This is not an exhaustive list of metaphors or phrases to avoid. These are examples only.

- **Unconscious bias:** Unconscious bias (or implicit bias) is often defined as prejudice or unsupported judgments in favour of or against one thing, person or group as compared to another in a way that is usually considered unfair. Biases may exist toward any social group.

One's age, gender, gender identity physical abilities, religion, sexual orientation, weight and many other characteristics are subject to bias.

We all hold unconscious biases about various social and identity groups. These biases stem from our natural inclination to organize our world by categorizing it. It is important to self-reflect on your own unconscious biases and try to deconstruct or actively work against them where possible. Although it may be hard to change your thinking around groups, a first step is to check your actions and words to ensure that they do not reinforce stereotypes.

- **Language changes:** Although this Guide attempts to provide up-to-date best practices for inclusive language, because language is constantly evolving it will never be as current as modern language. Be aware that you may not know the current meaning a term or phrase has to particular social groups and exercise caution in using terms or phrases that you are not familiar with.
- **Words matter:** As discussed, terms and phrases can perpetuate or limit the feeling of inclusion experienced by people or groups. They can also convey or embed stereotypes, expectations or limitations and can have real impacts on the resources people have access to in their daily lives. Words have power and words can shape life outcomes. Keep this in mind when practicing inclusive language.

Section 2: Inclusive language topics

The following sections provide inclusive language guidance around specific topics, including identities and social categories.

Age



York Region’s older adult population (65 years and over) is growing rapidly. According to the [2016 Census](#), older adults made up a record high of 15% of York Region’s population, representing a 34% increase between 2011 and 2016. The youth population (15 to 24 years) accounted for 13% of the Regional population in 2016. Both age groups are vital and thriving and make up a significant portion of York Region’s population overall.

Despite the stereotype that older adults cannot contribute and are in physical and mental decline, many older adults are physically and mentally active and engaged in the community. On the other end of the age spectrum, youth can be dismissed as being inexperienced or immature. In actuality, many youth have experienced a range of life circumstances and are often at the forefront of technological evolution. Even though there can be a gap of up to 40 years between these age groups, older adults and youth can experience similar barriers to participation.

The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) protects individuals from discrimination based on age in the protected social areas. **Ageism** is the stereotyping and discrimination of individuals based on age. Ageism can cause discrimination against, or the exclusion of, youth and seniors from accessing services or participating in the workforce and community.

General principles

The table below provides some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of age, as well as examples of problematic and preferred terms.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Refrain from using age descriptors when talking about people or groups.	Using an age descriptor (such as “youthful” or “mature”) may offend people who feel sensitive about their age or may suggest positive or negative beliefs about age.	Problematic: Young and vibrant team. Mature workforce. Preferred: Vibrant and effective team. Experienced and skilled workforce.
Do not make comments about people’s age or appearance, regardless of whether it is meant as a compliment.	Comments about perceived age suggest that age has value as a characteristic to judge people by.	Problematic: “You look good for your age”. Preferred: Generally speaking, you should not be commenting on people’s appearance. If you are confident that the compliment will be received well, consider: “You look well”.
Do not ask about a person’s age.	Asking this question could be perceived as passing judgement on a person based on their age. Age may also be a very personal detail	Problematic: “How old are you”? Preferred: “I’m impressed by your skills, knowledge, experience”.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
	that a person may not want to disclose.	
Do not make assumptions about the capabilities of people based on their age.	Making premature assumptions about people's ability to perform a task based on age may lead to their arbitrary exclusion from an activity or opportunity.	Problematic: "You are too old to understand how this new software works". Preferred: "Your experience is valued. Please provide your feedback on how the new software is functioning".
Do not use condescending phrases that reference age-related behaviour.	There are several phrases in the English language that refer to behavioural expectations based on age. These phrases should be avoided as they are disrespectful and ageist.	Problematic: "Act your age". "You'll understand some day". "It's not like that anymore". "That's ancient history". "Get with the times". Preferred: "I respect that we have different approaches and perspectives".

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred terms relating to age and the problematic versions of these terms that must be avoided.

Preferred	Problematic
Older adult, senior Please note: some people prefer older adult over senior and some people prefer senior over older adult. Respect the unique language preferences of the individual	When used in a condescending way: old man/woman, old person, oldies, old-timer, elderly person, aged person, grey-hairs, grandpa, grandma. Codger, ancient, baby boomer, boomer
Young adult, young person	When used in a condescending way: junior, kid, kiddo, punk, wet behind the ears, child, whippersnapper, baby, toddler, adolescent, teenager, millennial
New to the job field, has potential	When used in a condescending way: immature, naïve, too young, underdeveloped, fresh, inexperienced
Experienced	Past their prime, older worker, retirement age, set in their ways, worn out

Citizenship or Immigration Status



As of [2016](#), 47% of York Region residents were born outside of Canada. In Ontario, York Region had the third highest percentage of residents born outside of Canada after Peel and Toronto. Recent immigrants, or newcomers, accounted for 10% of all immigrants in York Region.

Immigrants, with or without Canadian citizenship, are valued community members. They are vital to Canada’s economic and social prosperity. Despite this,

discriminatory stereotypes and beliefs around people without Canadian citizenship, immigrants and newcomers still exist. These may include beliefs that newcomers are “stealing jobs,” are in Canada “illegally,” “are taking advantage of Canada’s hospitality” or “just aren’t real Canadians.”

The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) protects individuals from discrimination based on citizenship status. This means that immigrants who do not have Canadian citizenship cannot be denied service or be discriminated against because of their citizenship status. An exception to this is if Canadian citizenship is a legal requirement or a *bona fide occupational requirement* to obtain a job or certain services. For example, the law requires you to be a Canadian citizen to vote in a municipal or provincial election; this requirement is not discriminatory.

General principles

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of citizenship/immigration. Please note: Only address someone’s experience as an immigrant if they shared this information with you and they are comfortable discussing it.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Do not comment on someone’s citizenship or immigration status unless it is directly related to the conversation.	A person’s citizenship/immigration status may be a sensitive subject and should be avoided as a conversation topic. Commenting on or asking about someone’s citizenship/immigration status may come across as a judgment of someone’s eligibility to work or use services in Canada.	Problematic: “What’s your citizenship status?”, “Do you have a work visa?”, “Are you here legally?” Preferred: “I’m so glad to have you on my team. Your previous experience outside of Canada is really helping this project”.
Do not make jokes or comments about the length of time someone has been living in Canada.	Making judgements about the length of time someone has been in Canada may imply there is a connection between time spent in Canada and personal worth. This may come across as dismissive of personal experiences and the knowledge they gained outside of Canada. Generally, this should be avoided as a topic unless it is relevant to the conversation.	Problematic: “How long have you been living in Canada?”, “Are you fresh off the boat?”, “You’re new, so you probably don’t know that’s not how we do things in Canada”. Preferred: “I hope you have enjoyed your time in Canada”. “How have you enjoyed being in Canada?”
Do not make derogatory comments about	A person may have many reasons for choosing to leave their country of origin, either permanently or	Problematic: “No wonder you came to Canada, your home country sounds very uncivilized”.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
someone's country of origin.	temporarily. Assuming they left their country of origin for negative reasons can be very offensive.	"People are crazy drivers in your country!" Preferred: "What do you miss about [country of origin]?"
Do not use language that suggests that immigrants or people without Canadian citizenship are not qualified to work.	Immigrants and people without Canadian citizenship are guaranteed economic and social rights, including the right to work in many circumstances. Do not assume that an immigrant or person without a Canadian citizenship cannot work and do not use language that reinforces this stereotype.	Problematic: "Are you allowed to have a job?" Preferred: "How are you enjoying your job?"

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred terms relating to citizenship/immigration status and the problematic versions of these terms that must be avoided.

Please note: This terminology should be used in a respectful way and not in an accusatory tone. The citizenship/immigration status of an individual should not be questioned/commented on unless it is necessary to securing/providing services or it is raised as a topic by the individual.

Preferred	Problematic
Newcomer	New Canadian, fresh off the boat, imposter, non-Canadian, illegal, green carder, alien, foreigner, outsider, stranger, new arrival, squatter, interloper, non-citizen, intruder, invader, refugee, undocumented
Person who is an immigrant, person without Canadian citizenship	Imposter, non-Canadian, illegal, green carder, alien, foreigner, outsider, stranger, new arrival, squatter, interloper, non-citizen, intruder, invader, refugee, undocumented
Person with Canadian citizenship, Canadian citizen	Taxpayer, legalized, a "real" citizen, a "real" Canadian

Creed or Religion



York Region residents practice and follow a range of creeds, religious beliefs and faith systems or do not practice a faith. The most recent data on religious affiliation ([York Region 2011 National Household Survey](#)) showed that about 77% of York Region residents reported having a religious affiliation. Affiliation with the Christian faith was reported the most, followed by affiliation with the Jewish, Muslim and Hindu faiths.

The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) protects individuals from discrimination based on creed in the protected social areas. The Code does not define creed, but according to the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#), “courts and tribunals have often referred to religious beliefs and practices”, and “creed may also include non-religious belief systems that substantially influence a person’s identity, worldview and way of life”. Despite the many legal advances in protections for people against discrimination based on creed, severe forms of creed-based prejudice, such as antisemitism and Islamophobia, have emerged in recent times. These are often shaped by international events.

General principles

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of creed or religion. Please note: Only ask about a person’s religious practices if you are confident in their religious affiliation and their comfort with questions (i.e., they have told you what their religious affiliation is).

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Do not use language with a group that assumes a common religious practice, belief or observance.	There is variety among practices within religious systems, and two people who affiliate with the same religion may not practice their religion the same way. Using language that assumes a particular practice or belief may lead to feelings of exclusion.	<p>Problematic: “What did you give up for Lent?”</p> <p>Preferred: “What did you do this weekend?”</p>
Do not pass judgement on religious practices or beliefs, including the absence of religious practices or beliefs.	Religious practice and belief can be a very personal subject. Making judgements about religious practices, beliefs or observances could be considered offensive.	<p>Problematic: “I thought you weren’t supposed to eat pork because of your religion?”</p> <p>Preferred: “What did your family do for Hanukkah this year?”</p>
Do not force an individual to accept or comply with a religious practice or belief.	Forcing someone to participate in one’s own religious practices or beliefs is inappropriate.	<p>Problematic: “Come join us in Christmas carolling! It’s an important part of the holidays!”</p> <p>Preferred: “What would you like to do for the holiday party?”</p>
Consider rephrasing common terms that reference religious practices or figures.	Referring to a religious practice or figure in a casual or disrespectful way may be offensive to some.	<p>Problematic: “I pray to Jesus we have good weather”. “What is your Christian name?”</p> <p>Preferred: “I hope we have good weather”. “What is your name?”</p>

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred terms relating to creed or religion and the problematic versions of these terms that must be avoided.

Preferred	Problematic
Work/school/winter break, vacation, holidays	Christmas break, vacation, holidays
That's surprising. That's interesting to hear	Oh my god! Sweet Jesus! Dear Christ!
Followers of the _____ faith (applies to any religious affiliation or belief system)	Holy followers, church go-ers
Followers of the Christian faith; Christians	Bible beater, Bible thumper, Fundie (short for Fundamentalist), Prod (short for Protestant), holy roller
Followers of the Catholic faith; Catholics	The/those Catholics
Followers of the Jewish faith; Jewish	The/those Jews
Followers of the Muslim faith; Muslims	The/those Muslims
Followers of the Sikh faith; Sikhs	The/those Sikhs
Followers of the Hindu faith; Hindus	The/those Hindus
Persons without a religious affiliation	Heathen, infidel, pagan, non-believer, without faith

Disability



The United Nations [defines](#) people with disabilities as “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (United Nations. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). [“Article 1 – Purpose”](#)). Not all disabilities are visible or permanent; a person can be born with a disability (congenital), or they may acquire a disability through age, illness or accident. A disability can be visible (e.g., use of a wheelchair due to spinal cord injury) or non- visible (e.g., mental illness) or occur only periodically (e.g., seasonal).

In [2017](#), nearly one in five or 17% of York Region residents 15 years of age and over lived with at least one disability. This percentage is expected to increase as the population grows and diversifies, and at some point in our lives, it is likely we will experience some form of disability. Although there has been a societal shift to better understand and respect people with disabilities, discrimination still exists.

The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) protects individuals from discrimination based on disability in the protected social areas.

General principles

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of disability.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Use language inclusive of the range of disabilities that exist.	Do not assume you know your audience and their disabilities. Many disabilities are invisible, and some people may not disclose their disability. Your language must be inclusive of the range of disabilities that exist.	<p>Problematic: “An elevator is available for wheelchair users”.</p> <p>Preferred: “There are various accommodations available for persons with disabilities. If you require an accommodation, please let me know”.</p>
Never assume a person’s disability, ability or health status based on their appearance.	Someone’s physical appearance is not a clear indicator of their physical or mental capabilities. Having a disability is not the same as being sick. Many people with disabilities are physically and mentally healthy.	<p>Problematic: “Don’t worry about lifting that box, I know you have balance difficulties”.</p> <p>Preferred: “Please let me know if you would like assistance moving your items”.</p>
Person-first language is preferred in many circumstances, but not all. On an individual basis, please use the terminology preferred by the person you are interacting with. Some persons with disabilities prefer the term “disabled person” to person-first language.	This type of language prioritizes the person first and references the disability second.	<p>Problematic: Blind person, deaf person, handicapped, afflicted with a disability, struggling with a disability, a victim of a disability</p> <p>Preferred: Person with a disability, person with a physical disability, person with a vision disability, person with epilepsy</p>
Generally, frame a disability and most medical conditions as something a person has rather than what they are.	This puts the emphasis on the person rather than the disability as the person’s identity.	<p>Problematic: She is disabled, he is arthritic, they are epileptic, she is deaf</p> <p>Preferred: She has a disability, he has arthritis, they have epilepsy, she has a hearing disability</p>
Be cautious about using words that suggest weakness, such as impairment or “suffer from”.	Language that suggests weakness due to disability will be offensive to persons with disabilities. Keep in mind that assistive and mobility devices usually increase people’s independence and are not symbols of dependence.	<p>Problematic: Wheelchair bound, confined to a scooter, physically limited, mentally compromised</p> <p>Preferred: Person who uses a wheelchair, person who uses a mobility device, person with a cognitive disability</p>
Be cautious about portraying a person as “courageous” or “special” just because they have a disability.	Describing a person with a disability as “courageous” or “special” because they have “overcome” a disability implies it is unusual for people with disabilities to have talents and the ability to contribute to society.	<p>Problematic: “You are very courageous for coming in here, given your mobility challenges”.</p> <p>Preferred: Treat and talk to persons with disabilities the same way you talk to anyone else.</p>

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred terms relating to disability and the problematic versions to avoid.

Preferred	Problematic
Person with a physical disability	Wheelchair or scooter bound, handicapped., physically challenged, physically limited, incapable, differently abled
Person with a cognitive disability/developmental disability/intellectual disability	Dumb, slow, SPED (for special education), retarded, developmentally delayed, stupid, cognitively challenged
Person with a visual disability, person with vision loss <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blind, for someone who has complete loss of sight • Legally blind, for someone who has almost complete loss of sight • Limited vision, low vision or partially sighted, for someone who is neither legally or completely blind 	Visually challenged, blind-as-a-bat, partially blind, the blind
Person with a hearing disability, person with hearing loss	Hearing challenged, the deaf (unless referring to the deaf community), deaf and dumb, deaf-mute, hearing impaired
Person who is deaf-blind (person who has any combination of visual and auditory disabilities)	The deaf-blind, the blind, deaf and dumb
Person with a speech disability, person with a speech impediment	Stutterer
Person with Down Syndrome (only use this terminology when it is directly relevant to the context)	Mongoloid, mongolism
Person with a form of dwarfism	Midget, dwarf
Person with autism	Autistic, low-functioning, high-functioning, on the spectrum
Seizures	Fits, spells, attacks
Person who is not disabled, person who is non-disabled, person without visible disabilities	Normal, regular, unchallenged

Gender, Gender Identity and Gender Expression



The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) protects individuals from discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression in the protected social areas.

Although gender identity has historically been understood as a male and female, gender is now understood as a spectrum. A person's gender identity can fall anywhere along the spectrum, and gender identity is not the same as one's sex assignment at birth.

It is important to acknowledge our society has historically demonstrated bias through language in favour of men and against women. Language has discriminated against women by not properly reflecting their role and status in society.

Language can take on unnecessarily gendered forms. This includes words, phrases and expressions that differentiate between women and men, or exclude or diminish either gender or the spectrum of gender identities. For example, "the best man for the job" can be replaced by "the best person" or "candidate for the job." Similarly, "manpower" can be replaced by terms such as "workforce," "personnel," "staff" and "human resources." Using gender-inclusive language means speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against or stereotype gender identity or expression.

Definitions of gender-inclusive terms

To practice gender-inclusive language, familiarize yourself with these terms and meanings:

- **Gender identity:** An individual's understanding of their gender
- **Gender expression:** An individual's personal choice to express their gender identity, including how they dress and behave
- **Sex assignment at birth:** The sex someone is assigned at birth according to their biological traits
- **Intersex:** A person born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical definitions of female or male. For example, a person might be born appearing to be female on the outside, but having mostly male-typical anatomy on the inside
- **Cisgender:** A person whose gender identity aligns with their sex assignment at birth
- **Transgender:** A person whose gender identity that differs from their sex assignment at birth
- **Genderfluid:** A person whose gender identity fluctuates
- **Gender variant, genderqueer and gender non-conforming:** A gender identity and/or expression that does not conform to the gender-based expectations of society
- **Non-binary:** A gender identity that does not align with the traditional male/female binary
- **Agender:** Someone who does not have a gender identity
- **Bigender:** Someone who experiences two different gender identities, simultaneously or varying between the two. The gender identities could be male, female or the full range of the gender spectrum
- **Pangender:** Someone whose gender identity is not limited to one gender. These identities may shift over time or they may be static
- **Two-Spirit :** A gender role believed to be common among most, if not all, First Peoples of Turtle Island (North America), one that had a proper and accepted place within native societies

Learn more by accessing [519's Glossary of Terms](#).

Pronoun guidance

Using the correct pronouns that respect someone's gender identity is a very important part of making them feel included and respected and fostering a sense of belonging.

A **gendered pronoun** is a pronoun that references a person's gender, such as "hers/his," "he/she," "him/her," or "herself/himself." Pronouns in English originally developed around binary gender norms (male/female) may not match a person's gender identity or expression. It is more inclusive to use the gender-neutral pronoun "they" in written communication. Many non-binary and gender fluid people prefer the gender-neutral pronoun "they" in reference to themselves. You may want to consider privately asking about the preferred term(s) used by an individual. When referring to someone whose identified pronouns are unknown, it is usually preferable to use non-gender-based language as in "they/them/their."

Learn more about gender pronouns by accessing the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity's [guide to pronouns](#).

General principles

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on gender identity, expression and sex assignment.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Avoid assumptions about gender and use gender-neutral language.	You cannot make assumptions about people's gender identity based on their dress, physical appearance, tone of voice or behaviour. It is easier to remain gender-inclusive if gender neutral language is used. Another option is to eliminate the use of a pronoun.	Problematic: "The employee should inform his manager of any schedule changes". Preferred: "Employees should inform their manager of any schedule changes". "Employees who require schedule changes should contact the manager".
Always remember that gender identity is different from sex assignment at birth.	Someone's biological traits cannot be used as an indicator of their gender identity or as an appropriate measure of how people engage in gender expression.	Problematic: "Because you are a man, I expect you to wear a shirt and tie to the workplace". Preferred: "Dress in attire that is appropriate for the workplace".
Avoid asking people what their gender identity is. Instead, ask individuals what pronouns they prefer and let them know your preferred pronouns too. In group settings, do not single a person out publicly by asking their preferred pronouns. Instead, make it part of group introductions.	Asking for and using someone's proper pronouns is the easiest way to affirm and validate their gender identity.	Problematic: "What gender are you?" Preferred: "Let's all go around the room and introduce ourselves, our interests, and if you'd like to, please feel free to share your preferred pronouns".

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Respect name preferences.	Transgender persons may transition to a different name from their birth name. Gender fluid/bigender or pangender persons may use a different name depending on their current gender identity. Respecting name changes can make people feel included.	Problematic: “I won’t call you by your new name because that’s not what I know you as”. Preferred: “Great to see you today, ____ [use of preferred name]”.
Respect terminology.	Gender non-conforming individuals may describe their identity and experience using a range of terms and it is important to respect their preferences. Two people with similar identities may have different terminology preferences.	Problematic: “Jane is what I think they call a transexual”. Preferred: “Jane identifies as a transgender person”.
Do not ask about the status of someone’s transition or their gender-affirming surgery.	This is a very sensitive and private topic for most individuals and should not be discussed unless it is raised by the individual.	Problematic: “Have you transitioned yet?” Preferred: This should not be raised as a question or conversation topic unless raised as a topic by the individual.

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred gender-related terms and the problematic versions of these terms. Please note: the problematic terms listed below are acceptable if the person’s desired terms are known.

Preferred	Problematic
Gender-neutral terms	
<i>When pronouns are unknown:</i> They/them/theirs	He/him/his, she/her/hers, his or hers
<i>When gender identity is unknown:</i> The person, individual	Man, woman
<i>When the gender identity of someone’s partner/spouse is unknown:</i> Partner, spouse	Boyfriend, husband, girlfriend, wife
“Hi everyone/folks/teams/friends.”	“Hi guys/girls/ladies/gentleman.”
<i>When the gender identity of someone’s sibling is unknown:</i> Sibling	Brother, sister
<i>When the gender identity of someone’s sibling is unknown:</i> Nibling	Niece, nephew
Gender identity, expression and sex assigned at birth terms	
Assigned male/female at birth, designated male/female at birth	Biologically male/female, genetically male/female, born a man/woman

Preferred	Problematic
Cisgender	Normal, uncomplicated
Gender-affirming surgery, gender-confirmation surgery, transitioning Please note: This a very personal topic of discussion and should not be addressed unless brought up by the individual.	Sex change, sexual reassignment surgery, gender reassignment surgery
Intersex	Hermaphrodite, she-male
Non-binary, gender non-conforming, gender variant, genderqueer	Gender confused, mixed up, undecided
Transgender people, transgender person	Transexual, cross-dresser, drag queen, transvestite, transgenders, a transgender, "It" Please note: Transgender should be used as an adjective, not as a noun. Do not say, "Tony is a transgender," or "The parade included many transgenders."
Transgender (adjective)	Transgendered Please note: The adjective "transgendered" can confuse the word tense and should not be used.
Gender	
People, human beings, humanity	Mankind
Actor (for male and female actors)	Actress
Best candidate for the job	Best man for the job
Business-person, executive, manager, entrepreneur	Businessman, businesswoman
Clerical staff, office worker, personal assistant	The girls, the ladies
Firefighter, cleaner, police officer	Fireman, policeman, cleaning lady
Chair, chairperson	Chairman, chairwoman
Utility worker, tradesperson, foreperson	Utility man, tradesman, foreman
Fair, sporting, team player	Sportsmanlike, sportsmanship
We need someone to staff the desk	We need someone to man the desk
The best person or candidate for the job	The best man for the job
Staff hours, work hours	Man hours

Indigenous Peoples



environment.

York Region is home to a growing Indigenous population. In 2016, 5,910 people identified as Indigenous, a 30% increase from 2011. Indigenous Peoples today are survivors of what has been described as cultural genocide as a result of colonization. As a commitment to reconciliation, using language that more accurately reflects Indigenous Peoples is essential for relationship-building and supports a culturally safe

Definitions of Indigenous terms

To practice inclusive language, familiarize yourselves with Indigenous related terms and meanings.

- **Indigenous** is a general term and is a preferred term in international writing and discussion. In Canada, Indigenous collectively refers to people who identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. More specifically:
 - **First Nations** describes people who identify as First Nations, which have distinct cultures, languages and traditions and connections to a particular land base of traditional territory
 - **Métis** is a French term for “mixed blood,” which refers to the specific group of Indigenous people who trace their ancestry to the Métis homeland and are accepted members of the Métis community
 - **Inuit** refers to a group of people who share cultural similarities and inhabit the Arctic regions of Canada, Greenland, Russia and the United States. Inuit is a plural noun, and the singular is Inuk. “Inuit” means “people,” so it is redundant to say “Inuit people”
- **Aboriginal** refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people and is no longer the preferred term; Instead use the term Indigenous
- **Indian** is the legal identity of an Indigenous person registered under the [Indian Act](#). This is considered an outdated and derogatory term for Indigenous persons and should only be used when citing titles, works of art, etc., or when discussing history, legislation or constitutional matters
- **Elder** is a term of respect for a member of the Indigenous community who has attained a high degree of understanding of traditional teachings, ceremonies, regalia and healing practices
- **Knowledge Keeper or Carrier** refers to an Indigenous person who shares knowledge about traditional practices such as ceremonies and medicines
- **Treaty Indians** are Indigenous people who are members of a community whose ancestors signed a treaty with the Crown and, as a result, are entitled to treaty benefits
- **Colonization** refers to when Europeans migrated to North America, took control of the land and imposed their cultural values, religion and laws on Indigenous Peoples
- **Residential Schools** is a term for government-sponsored religious schools that were established to assimilate Indigenous children into Euro-Canadian culture
- **Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)** was officially launched in 2008 as part of the [Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement](#) (IRSSA). Intended to be a process that would guide Canadians through the difficult discovery of the facts behind the residential school system, the TRC was also meant to lay the foundation for lasting [reconciliation](#) across Canada

General principles

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of Indigenous Peoples.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
<p>Be aware of the use of the term Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous peoples</p>	<p>There are three distinct groups of Indigenous Peoples in Canada: First Nations, Métis and Inuit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Indigenous Peoples” is commonly used as a collective term for all of the original or first peoples of Canada and their descendants • “Indigenous people” with a lower case “people” refers to more than one Indigenous person rather than the collective group of Indigenous Peoples. If a person is working with a specific group that identifies as First Nations, Inuit or Métis they are encouraged to use the more specific name rather than the broader term 	<p>Problematic: “Indigenous people are diverse.”</p> <p>Preferred: “Indigenous Peoples are diverse.”</p>
<p>Recognize that Indigenous Peoples come from different nations with distinct languages, cultures and customs</p>	<p>To be respectful of different nations, the specific nation, community or band name should be used when possible. You are encouraged to use the spelling that the Indigenous group prefers.</p>	<p>Problematic: “The Indigenous group has a growing population.”</p> <p>Preferred: “The Chippewas of Georgina Island have a growing population.”</p>
<p>Be cautious about vocabulary that implies ownership</p>	<p>To avoid insinuating that Indigenous people belong to any person or government, language must be used that avoids ascribing ownership. Instead of describing Indigenous Peoples as “belonging” to Canada, as in “Canada’s Indigenous Peoples,” it is more respectful to say, “Indigenous Peoples living in Canada.”</p>	<p>Problematic: York Region’s/Ontario’s/Canada’s Indigenous Peoples, our Indigenous communities</p> <p>Preferred: Indigenous People living in what we now recognize as Canada</p>
<p>Capitalize formal titles and maintain consistency</p>	<p>Capitalization demonstrates respect and recognition of a person’s title.</p>	<p>Problematic: “We invited elder Snow”.</p> <p>Preferred: “Elder Vera Snow will attend the event”.</p> <p>NOTE: When it is a part of a person’s title, capitalize “Chief,” “Hereditary Chief,” “Grand Chief,” and “Elder.”</p>

General principles	Important because...	Examples
		Capitalization is also necessary when referring to “Nation” or “Nations.” Do not a term that is not a part of someone’s title, for example, “She is an elder.”

The following is a list of preferred Indigenous related terms and the problematic versions of these terms to avoid using.

Preferred	Problematic
Indigenous Peoples	Indian (unless stating from a legal document), Native (unless stating title of organization), Aboriginal (some legislation uses this term), Native Americans
Aboriginal People Please note: The term can be used when referring to Constitutional Rights or organizations and/or groups with ‘Aboriginal’ in the title.	Indians, Natives, Native Americans
First Nations	Indians, Natives, Aboriginals, Native Americans
Métis	Indians, Natives, First Nations, Inuit, half-breed
Inuit	Indians, Natives, First Nations, Metis, Eskimo
Elder	Old Indian, old geezer, senior
Traditional medicines – Sage, sweetgrass, tobacco and cedar	Marijuana
Colonization	Settlement, European arrival
Reconciliation	Helping Indigenous persons, giving Indigenous persons special treatment

There are various online tools to inform inclusive language related to Indigenous Peoples you can explore, including:

- [Aiyisnowak – A Communications Guide](#)
- [A Guide to Indigenous Protocol](#)
- [Indigenous Peoples: A Guide to Terminology](#)
- [Twenty-Three Tips on What Not to Say and Do When Working Effectively With Indigenous Peoples](#)

Low-Income Status



Between 2010 and 2017, 25% of York Region residents experienced low-income at some point, a 24% increase from a 2006 to 2013.

People who experience low-income status have historically been socially judged or blamed for their situation. In recent years, there has been growing recognition that low-income status is often a result of intergenerational circumstance rather than bad choices.

General principles

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of low-income status.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Do not phrase low-income status as something someone chooses or is responsible for	Low-income status is often not the result of bad choices or actions. It is often the result of intergenerational poverty or uncontrollable circumstances. Language that suggests people are responsible for being in low-income may be considered offensive.	Problematic: “They are choosing to remain on social assistance”. Preferred: “They have had to remain on social assistance”.
Do not advise persons experiencing low-income on how to lift themselves out of their current situation unless providing advice is part of your job.	Persons experiencing low-income are likely to have engaged with the social service system and are aware of the supports available to them. Providing income, housing or other related advice may be taken as patronizing, especially if you are not informed about their unique situation. Income and housing advice should only be given if you are a professional.	Problematic: “Have you tried looking for rent-geared to income apartments? I hear that they can help people in your situation.” Preferred: “Have you talked to a social services professional?”
Do not use negative stereotypes about persons experiencing low-income status.	Anyone may experience low-income at some point in their lives. Perpetuating that those experiencing low-income are inferior to others is counter-productive to helping people move out of low-income status.	Problematic: “He is still on Ontario Works”. “He is so lazy”. “If you do not go to university, you will end up working a low-paying job the rest of your life”. Preferred: Follow the recommendation of the general principle.
Use person first language when referring to people experiencing low-income status.	Using person first language emphasizes that people experiencing low-income are people first, and their income status comes second. It also reinforces that low-income is not permanent.	Problematic: Poor person, impoverished person, low-income person, homeless person Preferred: Person experiencing low-income, person experiencing

General principles	Important because...	Examples
		homelessness, person on social assistance

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred low-income related terms and the problematic versions of these terms to avoid.

Preferred	Problematic
Person experiencing low-income, person with low-income status	Street person, couch surfer, beggar, poor person, poverty stricken, impoverished people, person in poverty, person experiencing poverty, poverty (as a noun) Please note: Due to the stigma associated with the word “poverty”, it is recommended that this word is avoided unless delivering or referring to federal/provincial legislation/policy that uses this terminology.
Person accessing social assistance or Ontario Works, person with a disability accessing Ontario Disability Support Program	Welfare seeker/user, food stamper
Person in a shelter, person experiencing homelessness, person experiencing insecure housing	Homeless person, shelter hopper, the homeless, street person, beggar, bum Please note: It is acceptable to describe actions to address homelessness as “homelessness programs”, but people should not be identified as homeless people
Person experiencing food insecurity	The hungry poor, the hungry
Person in conflict with the law	Criminal, gangster, squeegee kid, hoodlum, street kid, thug, street person

Marital Status and Family Status



Marital and family status refers to a range of family compositions, including lone-parent and blended families, families where parents are in a common-law relationship or families where the individual has no children or partner. Individuals do not always have control over their family composition, and there are no set roles that need to be filled in a family structure; there is no *right* family composition.

Outdated concepts about the ideal family composition may lead to prejudicial language that excludes and offends people with diverse family types. Language used must be sensitive of these facts and inclusive of all forms that a family may take.

The number of people living alone in York Region increased by 24% from 2011 to 52,465 people [in 2016](#), outpacing growth in all other family types. Multiple-family households increased by 15% to 2,650 households between 2011 and 2016, and the number of lone-parent families increased by 13% to 43,915 during the same period.

The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) protects individuals from discrimination based on family status in the protected social areas. According to the [Human Rights Commission](#), family status is defined in the Code as “being in a parent and child relationship”, including a parent and child type of relationship based on care, responsibility and commitment. This includes parents caring for children and children caring for parents.

General principles

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of marital or family status.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
<p>Avoid referencing someone’s marital status by using people’s names.</p> <p>Use the first name of the person you are interacting with in a business or casual situation. There may be some situations where the person you are interacting with would prefer a formal title. In some cultures, it is a sign of respect to refer to someone by their given title or last name.</p> <p>When interacting with someone you do not know, ask the person how they would like to be addressed.</p>	<p>A person’s marital status may be a sensitive topic due to recent changes or factors outside of a person’s control.</p> <p>Inclusive language should not ascribe value or importance to marital status. Titles like Mr., Mrs., and Ms., should be avoided if possible, as their use reinforces the importance of marital status to personal identity.</p>	<p>Problematic: “It’s great to meet you, Mrs. Nassif”.</p> <p>Preferred: “It’s great to meet you, Aalia”.</p>
<p>If a person is in a relationship, do not make reference to their wife, husband, boyfriend or girlfriend, unless those terms are preferred by the individual.</p> <p>Use the name of the person’s partner where possible.</p> <p>If the name is unknown, use partner or spouse.</p>	<p>The terms “husband”, “wife”, “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” may not be preferred terms in all circumstances.</p> <p>For example, a person may be in common-law relationship, but does not want to refer to their partner as a boyfriend or girlfriend.</p> <p>Married persons may have preferences about the terms used for their partners and they may choose not to use husband or wife.</p>	<p>Problematic: “How is your husband doing? [While in conversation with someone who is not married]”</p> <p>Preferred: “How is your partner doing?”</p>
<p>Do not ask if someone, or someone’s child, was adopted.</p>	<p>This can be considered invasive and personal. People may not be comfortable discussing this, and</p>	<p>Problematic: “Adopted children may need additional support</p>

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Never use language that suggests adopted children are disadvantaged when compared to non-adopted children.	some people, including children, may not know their own adoption status.	when transitioning into a new school environment." Preferred: "Some children may need additional support when transitioning into a new school environment."
Do not ask same-sex parents who the "mommy" or "daddy" is in the relationship.	This reinforces gendered family roles and suggests that same-sex parents must take on a gendered role to complete the "normal" family structure.	Problematic: "Is Andre the mommy in the relationship?" Preferred: "You and Andre seem like such good parents".
Do not ask lone-parents or individuals from blended households about previous relationships.	Lone-parent and blended families may be created for a variety of reasons. It is no one's right to know what those reasons are, and the privacy of the person coming from a lone-parent or blended household needs to be respected.	Problematic: "Why did your partner leave?" "Why did you remarry?" Preferred: Respect the privacy of the individual.
Be mindful of your comments to one-parent families due to their lone-parent status.	Uncalled for sympathy for lone-family households reinforces negative stereotypes about single-parents, including that they are struggling or unhappy.	Problematic: "I don't know how you manage the kids alone". Preferred: "You are a fantastic parent".
If necessary, it is preferable to refer to someone's "birth parent" rather than "natural parent" or "real parent."	The terms "natural parent" or "real parent" imply that an adoptive family is unnatural or not real.	Problematic: "It was nice meeting your real parents." Preferred: "It was nice meeting your birth parents."
Do not ask when someone will have a child or why someone has chosen not to have children.	Some people are childless by choice but find questions on the topic invasive and judgemental. Some people are unable to have children (childless by circumstance) and find questions about having children hurtful due to the implication it was a choice	Problematic: "When are you and Derek going to have kids?" "Why did you and Derek never have kids?" Preferred: This is not a topic of conversation that should be raised, unless brought up by the individual.
Do not provide fertility advice to those childless by circumstance.	Unless it was asked by the individual, providing suggestions and recommendations suggests that the person who is childless by circumstance is doing it wrong.	Problematic: "Have you tried... [x] to help with fertility?" Preferred: "How can I support you?"
Do not tell people who are childless by circumstance they are lucky for not having children.	This can be hurtful towards those that cannot have children.	Problematic: "You are lucky to not have to deal with kids." Preferred: Do not assign value to having or not having children.

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred marital and familial related terms and the problematic versions of these terms that must be avoided.

Preferred	Problematic
Use people's names in written and oral communication.	Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms.
Spouse, partner	Husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend
<p>Grownups, adults, caregivers, guardians, family</p> <p>Use with caution: Parents.</p> <p>Parents can be an exclusive term if it is used in a setting where all children may not have parents and instead have non-parental caregivers/guardians. Please make sure you know your audience before using "parents."</p> <p>Use grownups, adults, caregivers, guardians and family if parental status is unknown.</p>	Mother and father, mothering/fathering, mums/moms and dads
<p>Adults/caregivers with children, expecting adult(s), person expecting a child</p> <p>Use with caution: Expecting parent(s).</p> <p>Expecting parent denotes that the person will be taking care of the child after its birth. This may not always be the case. If the audience is unknown, be careful with this language.</p>	Parents with children, expecting mother/father
Children or child	Son, daughter
Blended family	Divorced family, stepfamily, mixed family
Childless by circumstance, childless not-by-choice	Childless family, childless couple, infertile parents
Family members	Members of a household
Person's last name or previous last name	Maiden name, married name

Mental Health and Mental Illness



Many people go through periods of positive and negative mental health in their lives. Some people who live with mental health conditions, such as anxiety or depression, may experience more frequent fluctuations in their mental wellness or longer durations of poor mental health. Every year, [one in five people in Canada](#) will experience a mental health problem or illness,. By the time an individual reaches the age of 40, one in two will have experienced a mental illness. Mental illness can affect anyone of any age, education, income level, or culture.

Because mental health and illness is invisible, no one can ever truly know the state of another person’s mental health. Using inclusive language in relation to mental health illness or conditions can lessen the risk of offending or stigmatizing those who are experiencing mental health illness and conditions.

According to the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#), the [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) protects individuals with mental health disabilities and addictions from discrimination and harassment under the ground of disability in the protected social areas.

Help to promote mental health by finding a shared language

The [Centre for Addiction and Mental Health \(CAMH\)](#) Health Promotion [video](#) explains the separate but interconnected concepts of mental health and mental illness. Mental illnesses are where our thinking, mood and behaviours severely and negatively impact how we function in our lives. Mental illnesses can include anxiety, depression, schizophrenia and other mood disorders. Mental health, like the term health, is a positive concept. It relates to our ability to enjoy life and to manage it to help us reach our goals. It is a sense of spiritual and emotional wellbeing. Mental health is more than the absence of mental illness.

Research shows that we should think about mental illness and mental health as separate, but interconnected continuums. A person without mental illness is not necessarily experiencing good mental health if they are going through difficult life circumstances. Similarly, a person with a mental illness does not necessarily experience poor mental health day-to-day.

General principles

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of mental health and mental illness.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Do not ask about a person’s mental health condition or diagnosis.	Mental health conditions can be a private topic. Openly asking for a diagnosis or condition may be considered rude and intrusive.	Problematic: “What is your mental health condition?” Preferred: “How are you?”
Do not assume people’s behaviour based on their condition or diagnosis.	Mental health conditions impact people differently and can vary day-to-day.	Problematic: “I thought schizophrenics were supposed to be delusional”. Preferred: Treat and talk to persons with mental health conditions as you would anyone else.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Do not assume the absence of a mental health condition in the absence of any physical indicators.	Mental health is invisible in many circumstances, and it is important not to make assumptions about an individual's condition. Due to the social stigma attached to mental health illness or disability, some people may be hesitant to disclose their condition.	Problematic: "None of my staff have mental health struggles, they are all well and act well." Preferred: "Let me know if you need support or a break in any way."
Do not equate suicide with a crime or with success.	The terminology around suicide must be sensitive of the fact that suicide happens to people, it is not committed by people.	Problematic: "They committed suicide." Preferred: "They died by suicide."
Do not equate diagnosis with identity.	People who have a mental health condition are not defined by it. It is important to use language that recognizes people have identities outside of their diagnosis.	Problematic: "They are schizophrenic." Preferred: "They have schizophrenia."
Be cautious about portraying a person as "courageous" or "special" just because they have a mental health diagnosis.	Describing a person with a mental health condition as "courageous" or "special" because they have "overcome" a mental health condition implies that it is unusual for people with a mental health diagnosis to have the ability to contribute to society.	Problematic: "She is courageous for coming to work despite her depression." Preferred: Treat and talk to persons with mental health conditions as you would anyone else.

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred terms relating to mental health and the problematic versions of these terms that must be avoided.

Preferred	Problematic
Person with a mental health condition, person with depression/anxiety/other diagnosed mental health disorder, person living with a mental health problem	Crazy, crazy person, unstable, having mental disorders, insane, lunatic, mental, nuts, psycho, Schizo, manic, temperamental, hormonal, disturbed, psycho, mentally ill
This bothers/annoys/frustrates me.	This drives me crazy.
This individual lives with/is experiencing depression	This individual suffers from depression
Died by suicide	Committed suicide, successful suicide
Survived a suicide attempt	Failed or unsuccessful suicide attempt

Preferred	Problematic
Substance use, substance use disorder	Substance abuse, substance misuse, addiction issues
A person with a substance use disorder	Drug user, a person with a drug habit, an alcoholic, drunk, addict
In recovery, on the path toward recovery, not currently using substances	Clean, sober, staying clean
Medication-assisted treatment, medication for addiction treatment, medication, treatment	Replacement, substitution therapy Please note: Replacement and substitution therapy suggests that addictive substance use is being replaced by an alternative . Valid medical treatments stop substance use, they do not replace them.

Race or Ethnic Background



York Region is home to a mosaic of races and ethnicities. About 230 distinct ethnic origins were reported in York Region in the [2016 Census](#), and 49% of the population identified as a “visible minority” (see below for further discussion on the use of this term). The diversity of York Region’s population is expected to continue to grow as the population grows and reinforces the importance of using language that is inclusive as possible.

The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) protects individuals from discrimination based on ancestry, colour, race and ethnic origin or place of origin in the protected social areas.

When practicing inclusive language around race or ethnic origin, remember the history of racism in Canada and how language has been used to perpetuate discrimination and hate. Race is a social construct, which means “race” has historically been used to classify people into different groups based on physical differences. The process of social construction of race is called “racialization.”

The Ontario Human Rights Commission has adopted the use of the term “racialized person” and “racialized group” in recognition of the fact that race is a social construct. These terms are used in place of the more outdated and inaccurate terms “racial minority,” “visible minority,” “person of colour” or “non-White”.

There are some exceptions for when the use of “racial minority,” “visible minority,” “person of colour” or “non-White” could be considered appropriate:

- When you are referring to legislation, data or other federal/provincial policies and programs that use this language. The *Employment Equity Act*, for example, uses the term “visible minority”
- When you are referring to groups, organizations or collectives that have used this terminology in their name, such as the [Support Network for Indigenous Women and Women of Colour](#)

- The individual or organization requests you describe them using the outdated terms above. For example, a person may identify as a person of colour and request you refer to them as such if ever necessary

It is also important to use appropriate terminology when referring to addressing racism. You can access the Ontario Racism Directorate's [Glossary](#) to learn more about various terms such as anti-racism approach, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism and more.

Use of Black, Indigenous and Person of Colour (BIPOC)

In early 2020, the term BIPOC emerged as a way to recognize the unique experiences and inequalities faced by Black and Indigenous people in particular, and by other racialized groups in general. Although this term is largely used to call attention to systematic oppression, the use of "Persons of Colour" within the acronym to refer to a wide range of racialized groups has been contested by some. The argument is that the misuse of the term "BIPOC" could lead to the overgeneralization of racialized groups and the inequalities they face. Some people also object to the use of "Persons of Colour" within the acronym due its similarity to the term "coloured persons" and the continued suggestion that white individuals are colourless. For more information, read this article ["Why the term "people of colour" is offensive to so many"](#).

It is recommended that BIPOC is used with thoughtful consideration and with the points below in mind:

- When talking with or about individuals or smaller groups of people, avoid defaulting to umbrella terms such as "BIPOC" because these tend to be less accurate
- Do not refer to social inequalities as inequalities faced by the BIPOC community if they do not apply to Black, Indigenous AND other racialized groups. For example:
 - If you are bringing up the inequalities Black children may face in the education system, say "Black students" rather than "BIPOC students"
 - If you are discussing the high maternal death rates among Black and Indigenous women, do not say "BIPOC women," since other racialized groups do not face the same risk
- You might find yourself defaulting to "BIPOC" when talking about a friend, classmate or co-worker, but if you know their ethnicity and it is relevant to the conversation, use the most specific language possible

General principles

All racial and ethnic groups practice unique ways of naming and referring to themselves. Inclusive language in relation to race and ethnicity supports the diversity of Canada's population in positive ways and does not perpetuate stereotypes associated with appearance, language or cultural practices.

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of race and ethnic origin.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Do not assume a person's race, culture or ethnic background.	If you are not told by someone what their racial/cultural/ethnic background is, you should not make assumptions about this based on appearance. This could lead to inaccurate assumptions and may perpetuate offensive stereotypes.	<p>Problematic: “My co-worker looks Chinese and may require time off for Lunar New Year.”</p> <p>Preferred: “My co-worker has been working hard and may appreciate some time off.”</p>
Do not assume that people who share similar physical characteristics have similar racial/cultural/ethnic identities.	Assuming two people who appear similar in appearance share racial/cultural/ethnic similarities reinforces stereotypes.	<p>Problematic: “Have you met my new co-worker? He is also Asian. You two will get along.”</p> <p>Preferred: “Have you met my new co-worker?”</p>
Do not use racial, ethnic, cultural or other identity references if they are not necessary.	Referring to someone's racial, ethnic or cultural background, when unnecessary, could make a person feel isolated and treated differently than others.	<p>Problematic: “My staff member is a Chinese Canadian and has worked for us for three years.”</p> <p>Preferred: “My staff member has worked for us for three years.”</p>
<p>Consider when terms such as “visible minority,” or “person of colour” are relevant.</p> <p>Never purposefully identify a person by their racial or ethnic identity unless you know that person consents and it serves a legitimate purpose to the conversation.</p>	Both the term “visible minority” and “person of colour” are considered outdated. Before using such expressions, carefully consider if they are relevant or if a better expression or more specific identifier is available.	<p>Problematic: “My colleague is a person of colour.”</p> <p>Preferred: “My colleague has identified herself as Black and may like to know about the Employee Resource Group for Black staff.”</p> <p>Please note: Statistics Canada currently uses the term “visible minority” in its surveying. To accurately reflect data findings, it is recommended that the terminology used during data collection is also used in data reporting.</p>
<p>When it is necessary to refer to someone's racial, cultural or ethnic identity, find the most appropriate and widely accepted version of that terminology.</p> <p>If/when referring to a specific individual, check what their unique preferences are.</p>	<p>Terminology can change and evolve at a rapid pace and can also vary by location. Terminology can be personal and widely accepted terms might not reflect someone's individual preferences.</p> <p>There are innumerable racial, cultural and ethnic identities across the globe. While this Guide provides the current and widely accepted, terminology for several racial, cultural and ethnic groups, it can never fully capture the diversity</p>	<p>Problematic: Outdated terms including coloured people, people of colour, non-whites, oriental.</p> <p>Preferred: More modern and accepted terms, including person from Asia, person from the Black community, etc.</p>

General principles	Important because...	Examples
	of people that may live, work or play in York Region.	
Capitalize the proper names of nationalities, peoples and culture.	This demonstrates respect for the nationality of the person.	Problematic: black, indigenous people, Caucasian, arab, asian, etc. Preferred: Black. Indigenous people. Caucasian. Arab. Asian.
Use person first language when describing a person's place of regional origin, nationality or language.	Person first language demonstrates respect for the individual before defining them by their racial/ethnic identity.	Problematic: Pakistani. Blacks. Asians. Preferred: A person from Pakistan. A person from Asia. A person from the Black community.
Racial and ethnic stereotypes and generalizations must be avoided.	Any type of generalization or stereotype contributes to the idea that people belonging to a group are the same and may perpetuate negative connotations associated with groups.	Problematic: "Chinese people don't park well." Preferred: Follow the recommendation of the general principle.

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred race- or ethnic-related terms and the problematic versions of these terms that must be avoided.

Please note, not everyone will choose the same way to describe themselves. Use the language preferred by the individual to ensure you are not making assumptions or perpetuating stereotypes.

Preferred	Problematic
A person of Asian heritage/background/descent.	Oriental. Asians.
A person of Black heritage/background/descent. A person from the Black community. A person who identifies as Black. A person who identifies as an African-Canadian. Please note: Some people refer to themselves as "Black" and others prefer "African-Canadian." Please check with the individual what their preferences are.	Coloured. Person of colour. African-Americans. Non-whites. Blacks.
A person of East Asian heritage/background/descent. A person of specific East Asian heritage, for example: - Person of Chinese heritage/background/descent	The/those East Asians [or specific nationality].

Preferred	Problematic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Person of Japanese heritage/background/descent - Person of Korean heritage/background/descent 	
<p>A person of South Asian heritage/background/descent.</p> <p>A person of specific South Asian heritage, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Person of Indian heritage/background/descent - Person of Pakistani heritage/background/descent 	The/those South Asians [or specific nationality].
<p>A person of Southeast Asian heritage/background/descent.</p> <p>A person of specific Southeast Asian heritage, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Person of Indonesian heritage/background/descent - Person of Thai heritage/background/descent 	The/those Southeast Asians [or specific nationality].
<p>A person of Middle Eastern heritage/background/descent.</p> <p>A person of specific Middle Eastern heritage, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Person of Egyptian heritage/background/descent - Person of Iraqi heritage/background/descent - Person of Israeli heritage/background/descent 	The/those Middle Easterners [or specific nationality].
<p>A person of Latin American heritage/background/descent, person who identifies as Hispanic.</p> <p>Please note: Some people refer to themselves as “Latin-American” and others prefer “Hispanic” or “Latina” or “Latinx.” Please check with the individual what their preferences are.</p> <p>A person of specific Latin American heritage, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Person of Brazilian heritage/background/descent - Person of Costa Rican heritage/background/descent - Person of Mexican heritage/background/descent 	The/those Latin Americans [or specific nationality].

Preferred	Problematic
<p>A person of European heritage/background/descent, person who identifies as Caucasian.</p> <p>A person of specific European heritage, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Person of German heritage/background/descent - Person of French heritage/background/heritage - Person of Italian heritage/background/descent 	<p>The/those Europeans [or specific nationality].</p>
<p>Bi-racial. Multi-racial individuals.</p>	<p>Mixed race. Half or half-breed.</p>
<p>Developing world.</p>	<p>Third world.</p>
<p>Equity-<i>deserving</i> groups</p> <p>Please note</p> <p>The emphasis on deserving recognizes that groups' barriers to equal access, opportunities and resources are due to marginalization created by attitudinal, historical and environmental barriers.</p> <p>This term is not limited to racialized groups and can be applicable to other marginalized groups.</p>	<p>Equity-<i>seeking</i> groups</p>

Sexual Orientation



Sexual orientation refers to the characteristics and attributes someone is attracted to. Sexual orientation is *not a choice* and people's sexual orientation can change as they grow older or experience different life events. Sexual orientation is also a spectrum and people can be attracted to a range of characteristics between the male/female binaries.

Sexual orientation is not the same as **gender identity**. Sexual orientation is the outward attraction people feel for others, while gender identity is how we describe our gender to others.

The [Ontario Human Rights Code](#) protects individuals from discrimination based on sexual orientation in the protected social areas.

Phrases and terms that have historically been used to convey negative connotations towards the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Two-Spirit plus (LGBTQ2S+) community are not acceptable in inclusive language. For example, referring to something as being "gay" to suggest it is bad perpetuates negative and demeaning attitudes around people who are gay or lesbian. Inclusive language for sexual orientation should be respectful of the range of sexual orientations that exist and should not portray any underlying opinion or judgement.

Definitions of terms related to sexual orientation

To practice inclusive language, one should familiarize themselves with the terms and meanings related to different sexual orientations.

- **Heterosexual** is a term for people who are physically and emotionally attracted to persons of the opposite sex
- **Straight** is a colloquial term specifically for heterosexual persons. (This phrase is outdated, and use is not recommended.)
- **Gay** refers to a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender identity. This term can be used to describe men, women and non-binary people
- **Lesbian** refers to people who identify as woman that are attracted to people who identify as woman
- **“Bi” or Bisexual** refers to people who are physically and emotionally attracted to persons of both genders
- **Pansexual** refers to people who are not limited in their ability to develop attraction to people of any gender identity, sex assigned at birth or gender expression
- **Asexual** refers to a lack of sexual attraction to others
- **Queer** is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities that are not heterosexual or cisgender
- **Questioning** refers to persons who are exploring their sexuality
- **Homophobia** refers to fear or contempt for people who are gay or lesbian
- **Heteronormativity** refers to a cultural state in which heterosexuality is considered “normal” and gay and lesbian behaviour and related activities are considered “deviant”
- Refer to Indigenous Peoples section to review the definition of “Two-Spirit”

General principles

Here are some general principles for inclusive language on the topic of sexual orientation.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Do not ask what someone’s sexual orientation is.	Sexual orientation is a very personal subject. Asking someone about this can be considered intrusive and offensive.	Problematic: “Do you like guys or girls?” Preferred: Follow the recommendation of the general principle.
Do not assume what someone’s sexual orientation is	Someone’s appearance or behaviour cannot be, and should not, be used to assess their sexual orientation. Assumptions about sexual orientation can create inaccurate and hurtful stereotypes.	Problematic: “Eduardo does a lot of cleaning; it makes me wonder if he is gay.” Preferred: Follow the recommendation of the general principle.

General principles	Important because...	Examples
Do not use terms and phrases that associate being gay or lesbian negatively.	This is offensive to persons who are gay and lesbian and creates stigma.	Problematic: “That is so gay.” Preferred: “That sucks.” “That is not good.”
Do not ask who the “man” or “woman” is in a same-sex relationship.	This insinuates that persons who are gay or lesbian have a gender role to play in a relationship.	Problematic: “Is Sergio the woman in your relationship?” Preferred: Follow the recommendation of the general principle
Do not call relationships between same-sex couples “same-sex” relationships unless it is necessary to clarify.	This unnecessarily treats same-sex relationships different from heterosexual relationships.	Problematic: “Suki is in a same-sex relationship.” Preferred: “Suki is in a relationship.”
Do not go out of your way to state that you are not gay or lesbian.	This could be considered offensive as it denotes you consider being gay or lesbian as problematic or to be avoided.	Problematic: “I’m not gay, but I support gay rights.” Preferred: “I support gay rights.”

Preferred terms

The following is a list of preferred terms relating to sexual orientation and the problematic versions of these terms that must be avoided.

Preferred	Problematic
Lesbian. Gay. Gay and lesbian community. LGBTQ2S+ community.	Queer (as an insult). Homosexual. Please note: Some members of the gay/lesbian community reject the term “homosexual” due to its historical use to frame attraction to the same sex as a disease. For more information, refer to GLAAD’s Media Reference Guide – Terms to Avoid
Sexual orientation.	Sexual preference.
Relationship. Same-sex relationship. Same-sex couple. Gay couple. Lesbian couple. Please note: Only use “same-sex relationship” instead of “relationship” if clarifying the “same-sex” nature of the relationship is necessary to the point being communicated.	Homosexual relationship. Homosexual couple.
Gay lives. Lesbian lives. Gay and lesbian lives.	Gay lifestyle. Homosexual lifestyle.
Bisexual.	Person who swings both ways.
Heterosexual.	Normal. Straight. Please note: Some members of the gay/lesbian community reject the use of the word “straight”

Preferred	Problematic
	due to the potential implication that gays and lesbians “deviate” from normalcy.
Issues relating to persons who are gay/lesbians.	Gay agenda. Lesbian agenda. Homosexual agenda.
Partner. Spouse.	Boyfriend. Husband. Girlfriend. Wife.

Promoting the use of inclusive language

While language is not always intended to exclude a person or a group, it may unintentionally have that effect. Becoming conscious of how language impacts others can help prevent feelings of exclusion and discomfort.

We all have a role to play in preventing the use of offensive rhetoric, narrative and language, and promoting the use of inclusive language. Here are some ways you can promote the use of inclusive language in your workplace, home, school or social setting:

- **Challenge yourself to use this Guide** to better understand the various topics and principles to learn the preferred terms to use when communicating in your community and workplace
- **Stay up-to-date with current terminology.** Language preferences and trends can evolve and change – sometimes quickly. Being aware of current terminology can help you be more inclusive in your communications
- **Recognize that all audiences are diverse.** Use language that is inclusive of everyone in your intended audience to celebrate and support diversity and inclusion in the community and in the workplace
- **If/when you make a mistake with your language, apologize.** Do not make excuses or ignore your mistake. Apologizing shows a commitment to learning and is a step in the right direction
 - If you find yourself in a situation where offensive and derogatory language is being used around you or about you, **turn the situation into a learning experience.** Strategies for reacting to offensive and derogatory language include:
 - **Rephrasing the term you heard (indirect):** Switching unacceptable terms with appropriate language in your responses back to the person you are having a conversation with. This provides what is known as a “social cue” - a spoken or non-spoken message that we give when responding to others. In this context, the social cue is that the language they are using is not appropriate and makes yourself and others uncomfortable
 - **Stopping, questioning and informing (direct):** Stopping an individual from using the language, questioning their use of the language and informing them why it is offensive. This strategy should only be used if you feel safe and comfortable doing so. You should never put yourself in a situation that feels unsafe or threatening. If you hear a colleague, friend or family member use language that makes you uncomfortable, you should take the opportunity to teach them about inclusive language
 - **Walking away and reporting (indirect):** This strategy should be used if you do not feel comfortable rephrasing offensive terms or informing the individual you are speaking with why the term is offensive. If you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, the appropriate action is to walk away and report the incident to the appropriate party, such as the person’s parent or

spouse (in a familial setting), a teacher (in a school setting) or a supervisor (in a workplace setting)

Let Us Know What You Think

We welcome your feedback. If you have any questions or feedback about this Guide or to request an accessible format, please contact us at:

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