



Diversity Forum

Language Guide

This language guide has been developed in collaboration with people who live in adult social care settings, people who receive care and support in the community, unpaid carers, frontline care workers, registered managers, senior leaders, educators, and members of the LGBTQ+ community with lived experience.

We are deeply grateful to everyone who shared their time, insight, and stories to shape this resource. Their voices, and the realities of their daily lives, sit at the heart of this guide and remain the reason we continue to push for more inclusive, affirming adult social care.

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LGBTQ+ Inclusive Language for Adult Social Care

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A comprehensive dictionary, thesaurus, and style guide for inclusive communication created by The OUT Standing Diversity Forum (OSDF) for the whole Adult Social Care (ASC) sector, with the help and support of those who live and work in the sector!

These are the lessons learned from listening to people's voices, stories and experiences. Interactions start well before someone chooses to work or live with us or chooses us to support them.

Remember, we can use this inclusive language on social media, websites, marketing materials, job adverts and of course when referring to the support that we provide.

This language can apply to everyone. People that we support, people that work with us, as well as their circles of care, and even people that work with our services, e.g. suppliers, commissioners, visiting health professionals, etc.

Introduction

In ASC, language is not just about communication — it's about respect, dignity, and the affirmation of identity. For LGBTQ+ people, the words used when communicating, care notes, conversations, and care plans can determine whether they feel safe, seen, and supported, or alienated and silenced. We hope you can use this guide to support your services and the people you support to deliver inclusive care.

This guide is designed to:

- Provide clear definitions of LGBTQ+ terminology.
- Offer inclusive alternatives to outdated or inappropriate words.
- Highlight terms to avoid and why.
- offer examples for use in care plans and daily interaction.
- Equip care providers and their teams with confidence to speak and write inclusively.

1. Principles of Inclusive Language in Care

- Person-first, identity-affirming
 - Always see the person first, but never erase their identity.
 - Example: “A resident who is transgender” rather than “a transgender resident” (unless the person prefers otherwise).
- Ask, don’t assume
 - Always check how someone describes themselves and what pronouns they use.
- Use their words
 - Reflect their own chosen language in care plans and interactions.
- Be specific and accurate
 - “Partner” rather than “husband/wife” unless told otherwise.
 - “Gender identity” rather than “gender preference.”
- Review regularly
 - Identities and terms can change. Build in prompts to update care plans annually or sooner.

2. Pronouns and Gendered Language

Term	Definition	Example in Care Use
Pronouns	Words used instead of a name to refer to someone. May be gendered (he/she) or neutral (they/xe.)	"Jamie uses they/them pronouns. Please ensure all staff use these consistently."
She/Her	Feminine pronouns.	"Maria said she would like her medication at 9am."
He/Him	Masculine pronouns.	"David says he has an appointment at 3pm."
They/Them	Gender-neutral, singular or plural.	"Alex said they would like to eat in their room."
Neo-pronouns	Less common pronouns such as xe/xem, ze/zir, ey/em.	"Taylor uses ze/zir pronouns — please include in the care handover."
Misgendering	Using the wrong pronoun or gender term. Can cause distress and harm.	Avoid by confirming pronouns on admission and updating care records.
Deadnaming	Using a person's birth or previous name without consent.	Always use the person's current chosen name in all documents and interactions.

3. Sexual Orientation Terms

Term	Definition	Example
Lesbian	A woman who is attracted to women.	"Jane is a lesbian and lives with her partner."
Gay	A person attracted to the same gender; often refers to men.	"Michael is gay and his partner visits daily."
Bisexual	Attracted to more than one gender.	"Chloe is bisexual and attends the LGBTQ+ social group."
Pansexual	Attraction to people regardless of gender.	"Ravi is pansexual."
Asexual	Little or no sexual attraction.	"Morgan is asexual and values close friendships."
Demisexual	Sexual attraction only after emotional connection.	"Casey identifies as demisexual."
Queer	Umbrella term for LGBTQ+ identities; reclaimed by many but not all.	Use only if the person uses it for themselves.

4. Gender Identity and Expression

Term:	Definition:	Example:
Transgender (Trans)	Gender identity differs from sex assigned at birth.	"Elliot is a trans man (assigned female at birth, identifies as male)."
Cisgender (Cis)	Gender identity matches sex assigned at birth.	"Priya is cisgender."
Non-binary	Gender identity outside male/female.	"Ash is non-binary; uses they/them."
Genderfluid	Gender identity shifts over time.	"Leigh is genderfluid."
Agender	No gender identity or a neutral identity.	"Jordan is agender."
Intersex	Born with biological traits that don't fit typical definitions of male/female.	Always respect chosen identity.
Gender expression	How someone presents gender via clothing, hair, etc.	"Sam's gender expression is more feminine."

5. Inclusive Alternatives for Everyday Language

Instead of...	Use...	Why:
Husband/Wife	Partner/Spouse	Avoids assumptions about gender or sexuality.
Ladies & Gentlemen	Everyone/Friends/Folks	Gender-neutral.
Real name	Chosen name/Given name	"Real" invalidates chosen names.
Both sexes	All genders	Recognises more than two genders.
Normal person	Non-LGBTQ+ person	"Normal" is exclusionary.
Preferred pronouns	Pronouns	"Preferred" implies optional.

6. Words and Phrases to Avoid

(and why)

Avoid: Homosexual — Clinical, outdated, linked to pathologising homosexuality.

Avoid: Transsexual — Outdated; use transgender or trans.

Avoid: Hermaphrodite — Offensive; use intersex.

Avoid: Sex change — Use gender affirmation/confirmation.

Avoid: Sexual preference — Use sexual orientation.

Avoid: Tranny — Slur; never use.

Avoid: He-she/It — Dehumanising.

Avoid: Born a man/woman — Use “assigned male/female at birth.”

Avoid: Lifestyle choice — Implies being LGBTQ+ is a choice.

Avoid: The gays/the transgenders — Reductive; use “gay people,” “trans people.”

Avoid: Normal couple — Implies LGBTQ+ relationships are abnormal.

7. Care Plan Prompts

Always include:

- Name and pronouns (legal name if required for records, plus chosen name if different)
- Gender identity and sexual orientation (if the person chooses to share)
- Privacy preferences (who can know)
- Partner and family details in inclusive terms
- Cultural/religious needs alongside LGBTQ+ identity