

# Inclusive Language

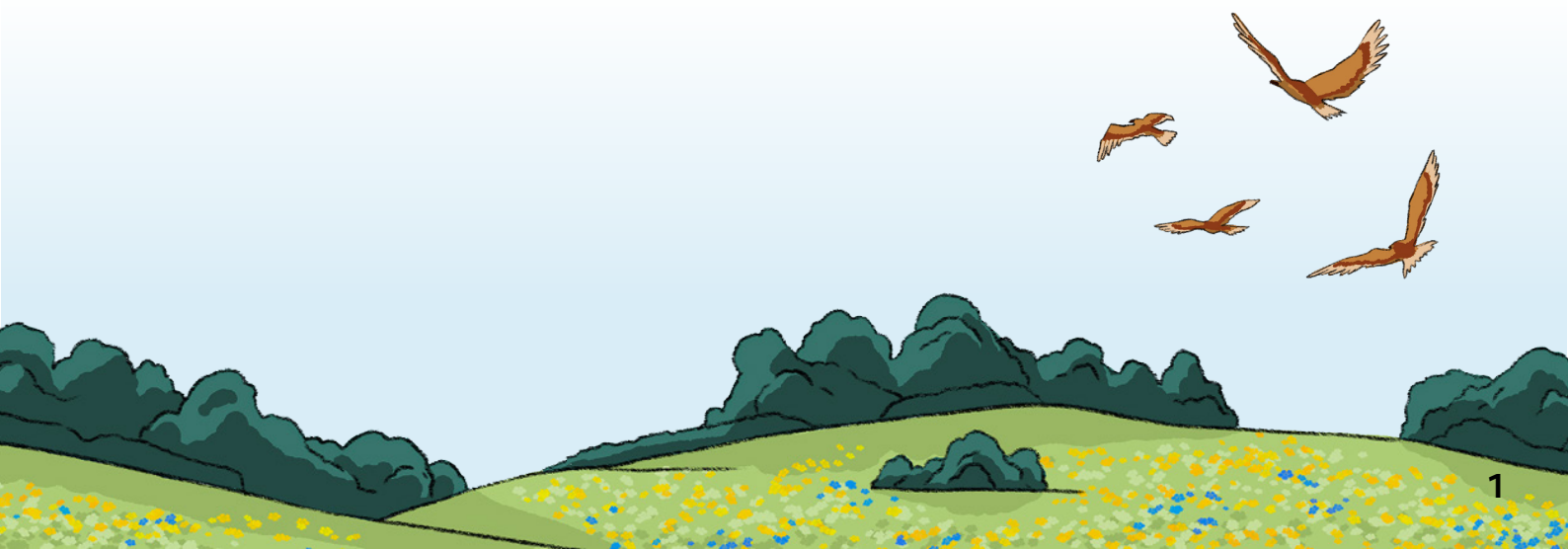


The words we use can influence how people view themselves and others. The language we use matters because it shapes attitudes, expectations and experiences. It can empower people, or it can reinforce stereotypes and exclusion. Choosing inclusive language isn't about following rules - it's about making sure people feel included, respected and valued.

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Glossary

Having a shared language helps us learn from each other and have more open conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion.

This [language guide](#) written by the Social Justice Collective, is designed to serve as a tool to help people feel more confident taking part in discussions, without worrying about getting things wrong, so that we can focus on learning together.



# Medical Model vs Social Model of Disability

A model of disability is a way of understanding what disability is and what creates disadvantage for disabled people. There are two main approaches, the medical model and the social model - which take very different views. The model people use often shapes the language they choose and how they think about disability.

The social model is widely supported by many disabled people, activists and Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs). It recognises that people are disabled by barriers in society, such as attitudes, environments and systems rather than by their impairment or condition itself.

## Medical Model

Focuses on the person's impairment as the problem it takes the responsibility off society/organisations to remove barriers that disabled people experience. This often leads to language like "confined or bound to a wheelchair," "victim of," or "suffers from" - which suggests dependency and limitation.

## Social Model

Focuses on how people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or condition. It uses language that is empowering, promotes independent living and aims to accurately describe disabled peoples lived experiences. It is often associated with identity first language – disabled people rather than people with disabilities.

# Person-First vs Identity-First Language

## Person-first

“Person with a disability” – putting the person before their condition.

## Identity-first

“Disabled person” – putting the condition before the person.

You’ll often hear person-first language, like “person with a disability”, because it places the emphasis on the individual; it focuses on the person and not their disability. While this sounds respectful, many people prefer identity-first language, such as “disabled person”.

Why? Identity-first language reflects the Social Model of Disability, which focuses on the barriers society creates - not the individual’s condition. It also acknowledges that disability, health conditions or neurodivergence can be an important part of someone’s identity.

Read more about inclusive language here:  
[Disability inclusive language – getting it right](#)



# Language choices aren't always simple

Using identity-first language or other Social Model terms isn't always straightforward because language constantly evolves and there's no fixed rulebook.

For example, phrases like “people with learning disabilities” or “people with mental health conditions” are widely preferred by those communities and advocacy groups, even though they don't strictly follow identity first wording. There is currently no alternative that fits the Social Model and is accepted by those communities. Generally, at Barnwood, we choose to avoid any terms that describe a mental health condition as a ‘problem’ or have any associated stigmatisation.

At Barnwood, we use Social Model and identity-first language (wherever possible) in our external communications. However, when speaking to individuals, we always use the language they prefer and feel comfortable with.

## Top Tip

Ask people how they prefer to be identified and respect their choices.



## Examples of how to apply Social Model Language

Suggested terms to use	Suggested terms to avoid
Disabled people	<p>The disabled</p> <p>The vulnerable</p> <p>People with different abilities</p> <p>Handicapped</p> <p>Infirm</p> <p>Cripple</p> <p>People with disabilities *Depending on individual identification and context</p>
People with mental health conditions	<p>Mental health issues</p> <p>Mental health challenges</p> <p>Mental, insane</p> <p>Mentally ill or sick</p>
People with a learning disability	<p>Mentally handicapped</p> <p>Mentally defective</p>
Non-disabled	<p>Able-bodied, normal</p> <p>Healthy</p> <p>Person without a disability</p>

Suggested terms to use	Suggested terms to avoid
<p>Neurodivergent person / people (when referring to an individual)</p> <p>Neurodiverse (when referring to groups)</p> <p>Neurodiversity (when referring to the concept)</p>	<p>Neurological disorder</p>
<p>People with (insert condition}) e.g People with MND or person with MND</p> <p>People with lived experience of (insert condition)</p>	<p>Suffers with</p> <p>Affected by</p> <p>Victim of</p>
<p>Autistic people or an autistic person</p> <p>Autism or on the autistic spectrum</p>	<p>People with autism or person with autism</p> <p>Autistic Spectrum Disorder</p>
<p>Sensory impairment, visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech impairment</p> <p>Blind and partially sighted people. People with visual impairments</p> <p>Deaf person or deaf people. People with a hearing impairment</p>	<p>The blind</p> <p>The deaf or the hearing impaired</p>
<p>Wheelchair user</p> <p>A person who uses a wheelchair</p>	<p>In a wheelchair</p> <p>Wheelchair bound</p> <p>Confined to a wheelchair</p>

## More resources

For more detailed information, refer to [Scope's Glossary](#) on how they speak about disability. This guidance covers specific conditions or impairments.

**All Protected Characteristics:** [Inclusive Language Guide - Oxfam](#)

### LGBTQIA+

[LGBTQ+Terms: Inclusive Glossary and Definitions | Stonewall](#)

[Language that liberates - 10 practical tips for LGBTQ+ inclusive language — Fighting Talk](#)

### Race

[Finding Consensus on Race and Ethnicity Terminology: In Conversation with Janine La Rosa and Adeola Agbebiyi](#)

[Language, Power, and the Global Majority. – BLAM UK CIC](#)

### Poverty

[Framing toolkit: Talking about poverty | Joseph Rowntree Foundation](#)



# Top Tips for Language

## Do not use language that:



- Reinforces stereotypes or derogatory terms.
- Excludes certain groups of people.
- Patronises or trivialises groups of people.
- Causes discomfort or offence.

## Do use language that:



- Acknowledges diversity, and intersectionality and conveys respect to all people.
- Empowers people and highlights their agency and strengths.
- Challenges conscious and unconscious biases.
- Recognises the individual lived experiences within groups.

From: [Inclusive Language Guidance - Equality and Inclusion Unit](#)



## Further Reading

[Talking About Disability: a practical guide](#)

[Keeping up to date with inclusive language - CharityComms](#)

[Inclusive communication - GOV.UK](#)

[Inclusive Communications Guide](#)

[Using Inclusive Language: Person-First vs. Identity-First Language Explained](#)

[Person-First Vs. Identity-First Language: How To Be Most Inclusive | BetterHelp](#)

[Social Model of Disability - Disability Wales](#)

[Person-First or Identity-First: The importance of Language](#)

[How to talk and write about autism guide](#)

