



# Inclusivity

## Language matters

As early as Kindergarten, we teach students inclusivity: don't leave your peers out, include them in games, groups

and teams. Inclusion is an integral part of society, commonly learned in schools. How can schools ensure they are promoting and encouraging inclusivity?

Inclusive language is a key part of making your students feel welcome and accepted. It is important to make sure that you use language that is gender, ability and race inclusive.

### 1. Don't make assumptions

Not everyone identifies with traditional gender roles. Some students and staff may have invisible disabilities or mental illnesses, and it is important to keep that in mind when choosing language. Calling someone or something "bipolar" as a joke or descriptor could be considered offensive by someone with bipolar disorder.

### 2. Avoid unnecessary descriptors

Avoid descriptors that refer to a person's sexual orientation, disability, age, gender or race unless directly relevant to the story.

### 3. Use gender-neutral terms

It is now encouraged grammatically to use "they," "them" and "their" in place of his/hers, him/her. This should

become standard when writing letters, memos or any other communication. This ensures that your language is inclusive of all staff and students, no matter what gender they identify with (if they choose to identify with one at all).

Replace common gendered terms with gender-neutral ones. Examples include person instead of woman or man, artificial instead of man-made, staffing the office instead of manning the office and humankind instead of mankind.

### 4. Learn appropriate terminology

Take time to learn correct terminology for different identities.

**Gender Identity:** Refers to how we view ourselves as masculine or feminine. For many, gender identity matches their physical body. For some, the way they see themselves as masculine or feminine is different from their physical body.

**Intersex:** Someone who is biologically not clearly male or female; more accurate and more acceptable than hermaphrodite.

**Sexual orientation:** The range of human sexuality from gay, lesbian, bisexual to heterosexual.

**Transgender(ed):** Someone who is, is moving toward or who has been more than one gender.

**Transsexual:** Someone who was identified at birth as one sex and self-identifies as another.

**Two-Spirited Person:** A belief in the existence of three genders: male, female and male-female gender. Traditionally, the Two-spirited person was one who had received a gift from the Creator to house both male and female spirits in their bodies, giving them the ability to see the world from two perspectives at the same time.

**Queer:** An umbrella for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and other non-heterosexual identities. Queer is increasingly gaining acceptance as an academic term.

**Bisexual:** An individual with the potential to be emotionally and/or sexually attracted to members of all genders.

**Gay:** An individual who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to a person of the same sex; often interchangeable with the term homosexual. ▲

With contributions from the Durham District School Board *Guidelines for Inclusive Language*.

✉ [jhermans@principals.ca](mailto:jhermans@principals.ca)