



Inclusive Language

Why are we interested in inclusive language? Simply put, the language we choose to use in our classrooms can have a powerful effect on our students. It has the power to both include and exclude people. Language reflects attitudes and behaviours and shapes people's thoughts as to what is normal and acceptable.

So, when we interact with our students are we ensuring everyone feels part of our classroom and a positive sense of belonging? Some phrases that we use are culturally embedded in our language, such as "don't go crazy". Some of them make assumptions, e.g. "*Chinese people are good at maths*" and some of them draw attention to differences, for example "*I am blind without my glasses*". Often we use these phrases as a habit, without really considering their meaning, or how they may make people around us feel.

Let's take "*boys will be boys*" and consider what this is actually communicating. It implies that boys' behaviour is expected to be different to girls' behaviour, usually worse, and that we should accept it, because since they are boys, they can't help it. This lowers our expectation of the behaviour of boys but also removes their responsibility to change it.

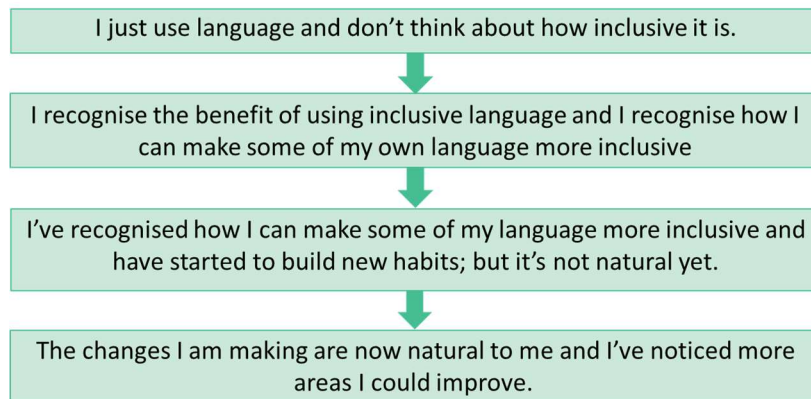
To get build on the video you watched last week, here are some things to consider in your language:

1. **Do you include unnecessary detail in your language?** For example, is it necessary to use gender or ethnicity when referring to a group? Different words for different groups can introduce stereotypes, and may induce stereotype priming. For example, if you refer to a group of male students as 'lads', research shows they are likely to start acting as stereotypical 'lads'. Referring to groups of people using their identities also risks inadvertently causing offence by using outdated or inaccurate terms. For example, Gypsy, Roma and Travelers are distinct different ethnic groups, but are often grouped together. If you do need to refer to a group and you are not sure of the correct term to use it's time to do some research or ask.
2. **Don't make assumptions about people.** This can range from assuming traditional gender roles in statements like 'when your mum makes you lunch' to heteronormative assumptions about peoples' family situations or racial microaggressions, where you make assumptions based simply on their ethnicity.
3. **Think about the meaning of what you are saying.** Does it reinforce a stereotype, or is it factually accurate? For example, asking for 'big strong boys' not only implies girls are weak, but puts the emphasis back on boys to be physically and emotionally strong.
4. **Does what you're saying draw in a protected characteristic in an inaccurate way?** This is often the case around disability and mental health where terms are used in every day



speech often trivializing serious conditions. For example, consider how using “I’m so OCD” in an off-hand way may make someone who has this mental health condition feel.

Everyone will be at different stages of how inclusive their language is, take some time to reflect where you are.



Language is constantly changing and evolving, and it may feel overwhelming to keep up with how to make your language inclusive. For more information on this, talk to your consultant about our Inclusive Language training module, where we have focused modules on language around gender, LGBT+, Disability and Ethnicity.

Whichever stage you are at, and regardless of how much time you can dedicate to shifting your language, there are all things we can do to make our language more inclusive.

The first step to changing your language to be more inclusive is to start to really **listen** to the language you hear and use. What is the **true meaning**? What **assumptions** are being made? Once you start to notice it, it makes it easier to recognize the importance of making changes.

The next step is to start to change the language you use. Choose a couple of words or phrases you commonly use, that you'd like to change to be more inclusive and decide on an inclusive alternative. Start to notice when you use the phrase, or when others use it. Start to consciously try to use your inclusive alternative, notice when you don't. It's a habit, so it will take time to make the change, but over time you should notice you use the inclusive phrase more often, and the non-inclusive phrase is phased out.

Shifting our language to be inclusive requires careful thought and purposeful action and will take time. We all make mistakes, often unconsciously, so be kind to yourself and recognize that this is part of the process.