

Neutral language guide

This isn't meant to be scary, and it's not about political correctness. This is about **not jumping to the wrong conclusions** about your colleagues or students. If you get it wrong, the best case scenario is they are slightly irritated. The worst case scenario is that you could make them feel unable to work with you or others around you, or indeed raise a complaint.

- LGB&T people's experience of unintentional discrimination has led to high levels of mental health problems within this group of people. The words that you use are incredibly powerful and can have a huge impact on how people feel about themselves.
- Women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) often experience implicit bias and assumptions – such as referring to “him” when talking about an author of a paper or it being assumed that they are not an academic. This further enforces stereotypes (only 1 in 7 people working in STEM is female [1])

If you don't know for certain what gender to use when talking about a person's loved ones, or you don't know if the person is male or female (could be you've only seen their name written down) or if you aren't sure whether someone identifies as male or female, here are a few tips on how to keep your language neutral until you know what terms they prefer to use.

- **Boyfriend/Girlfriend = partner**
- **Husband/Wife = partner, spouse**
- **Mum/Dad = parent**
- **Son/Daughter = child**
- **He/She = they**
- **Him/Her = their**

If you use the wrong term and they correct you, apologise sincerely and move on – don't dwell on it or make it into a big deal (this will be more embarrassing for both of you!).

And remember: just because someone wears a wedding ring, it does not mean that their partner is the opposite sex.

– adapted from Stonewall Scotland guide to include unconscious bias in STEM

[1] Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics, August 2016