

# Diversity Council Australia's

## 5 steps to inclusive language

### Transcript

**Speakers: Ami Raman and Chloe Ryan**

#### Ami Raman

I just want to reinforce before we move into this section that using inclusive language doesn't mean tiptoeing around sensitive topics. It's really about actively listening and visibly engaging with ongoing conversations about diversity and inclusion.

So the five steps to inclusive language as suggested by the Diversity Council Australia are firstly to keep an open mind. Again, I think a lot of the people here probably already on that same page because you signed up for this session. But I think it's really helpful for us to keep an open-mind as we all come across different information, people, ideas and things that challenge our own conception of what's normal. And I'm sure that throughout our lives, our idea of normal has shifted significantly.

So that's something that we need to be cognisant of, that there is no normal. So being open to changing what we've always thought is normal is really important. And also acknowledging that we're not always going to know and we just need to be open to change and willing to continue learning.

We also need to consider context. So something that might be appropriate in one situation might not be so appropriate in another situation. So thinking about what's appropriate in which situation is important.

And we've just had a question, I'm just seeing that's come through the discussion. So the question is if a student comes in looking for a teacher in our staff room, if they don't know the person's name, they might need to use their gender, age, culture, et cetera to describe who they're looking for. How else can you describe someone without being offensive?

It's a really, really great question. So thanks for asking that. And it actually fits quite well into what we're talking about now, which is the importance of context. So in a situation if you're able to describe someone in a way that's free from some physical characteristics then that's what you would do. But in a situation where there's no other sort of identifying features, again, it's about context and the intention.

Again, we don't have to really tiptoe around things where it might be the only way that you're able to describe someone. It's about context and what the intention is.

### **Chloe Ryan**

I think a point that we would probably reiterate through this session is not to make assumptions. So if there's no other way to speak about someone, I like thinking about the other identifying factors about describing somebody. So what do they teach? What do they do? What have they achieved? And then if we do look at those other factors that contribute to a person's identity, then having a good understanding perhaps of what that is and not making assumptions. And of course there will be times where we don't always get it right. But this is what we're hoping to highlight throughout the session that it's just about small steps and embedding that into, like a small step into our practice over time to make it sustainable and continue that modelling for our young people as well.

### **Ami Raman**

Yeah. Great. Thanks Chloe. And also that leads really nicely into the third point, which is really focusing on the person. So focus on the person first, rather than potentially a demographic group they belong to. So only really referred to someone's age or their cultural background or their gender if it's relevant. Because often, more often than not, it's not really necessary to differentiate or single out people based on these characteristics. And I guess the whole purpose of not doing that is we're trying not to perpetuate stereotypes. So again, it comes back to intention or what the implications might be by using that type of language.

I can also see some comments coming through that these are really great steps. So if you would like to know more, please look at the Diversity Council Australia's WordsAtWork reference because it fleshes these out in a lot more detail.

### **Chloe Ryan**

I think we'll be sharing the link to that and other resources at the end of the session. So, and we do have a lot of resources to share. So maybe think about what is one step that you would like to, or one part of our presentation that you'd like to focus on and look at that resource. So you're not too overwhelmed.

### **Ami Raman**

Yeah and we spent a lot of time wading through the best resources so hopefully we won't bombard you with anything that's not useful.

So the fourth one is really about asking if in doubt. And by asking it's more about using open questioning to build on your understanding, particularly when you feel like you might be making assumptions. And when we're using open questioning, we also need to practice active listening. Because if we're not actually listening, we might implicitly be making assumptions or judgements about what the person might be experiencing.

It's also really important to defer to people with lived experience when we're talking, particularly about groups of people. And the Diversity Council Australia recommends contacting organisations who make up and represent particular diverse groups. Because language is constantly evolving again. And advice or information from external sources might be really helpful, particularly when situations are unclear.

And this is the last point. I just really want to focus on because it's something I know historically I know I've been prone to this. But I think it can be quite a common experience to feel a bit defensive when you're called out on using language that's maybe not appropriate or when someone might correct a mistake with the language you're using. And it takes some conscious awareness to

actually make yourself open to feedback and to not respond defensively if someone recommends adjusting a word choice or calls you out on maybe on not saying the right thing.

So getting called out doesn't mean you need to defend yourself because we might inadvertently trivialise someone's feelings or their lived experience. Things you might think or say would be they are just overreacting. But that really doesn't help to build inclusion. So it's really helpful, again, when we look back at open questioning and keeping an open mind, it really helps us to refocus on understanding the other person's perspective rather than feeling like we needed to defend our way of thinking or not being able to correct our own mistakes.

### **Chloe Ryan**

I think it's important as teachers and as educators and as adults that we are able to say, apologise or point out when we are incorrect and really model that for young people.