Adopting inclusive language is an easy step towards building a more open and safer environment for our LGBTQI students and staff. Below you will find a few hints for adopting it in your daily communication.

i. Don’t assume a person is heterosexual

Avoid using language such as wife or husband that assumes all relationships are heterosexual. This excludes non-heterosexual people and devalues their relationships. Words and phrases such as partner, parents, relationship, in a relationship are examples of LGBTIQ inclusive language.

ii. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander vocabulary

The terms sistergirls and brotherboys are general terms used in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe transgender people and their relationships as a way of validating and strengthening their gender identities and relationships.

The terms sistergirls and brotherboys may also be used by non trans, but non-conforming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – e.g. both lesbian and heterosexual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women may refer to themselves as sistergirls, sisters or tiddas, which is a shortened version in Aboriginal English of the word sisters. Gay Aboriginal men may also refer to themselves as sisters.

iii. The use of pronouns

Some people use a gender neutral pronoun such as they (e.g., Pip drives their car to work. They don’t like walking because it takes them too long).

If you’re unsure what someone’s pronoun is, you can ask them respectfully, and preferably privately. Use a question like Can I ask what pronoun you use? Do not ask What pronoun do you prefer? A person’s pronoun and identity are not a preference.

Similarly, if someone discloses to you that they’re from one of the LGBTIQ communities, respectfully ask what terms they use to describe themselves, then use those terms.

iv. What if I make a mistake (when using pronouns)?

People may worry that they will offend or be embarrassed if they use the wrong term, name or pronoun, particularly for trans and gender diverse people. It’s important to try to use respectful language and some mistakes are understandable, particularly when you’re learning. If you make a mistake, apologise promptly and move on. Don’t dwell on it, and don’t give up – keep trying to get it right.

v. Welcoming or addressing large groups

You can easily include everyone and every gender by saying things like Welcome, everyone or Good morning, folks. These broader terms can also be useful when sending emails to large groups or departments.

vi. How can I collect data on LGBTIQ people?

Firstly – consider do you really need the information?

A detailed discussion of these matters recently published by the Victorian state government can be found here: LGBTIQ Inclusive Language Guide www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide. And remember, you can always talk to one of our EDI Committee or Ally Network members within the Department! visit goto.mq/edi-physastro