Grace Inclusive Language Guide

Adapted from [Bank Street Language Values](#) and the [Glossary Pilot](#)

Overview

The goal of this guide is to provide the community with more inclusive language that is aligned with the mission of Grace Church School. While we recognize hateful language that promotes racism, misogyny, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination are already addressed in our school handbooks, we also recognize that we can do more than ban hateful lanugage; we can use language to create welcoming and inclusive spaces. This guide addresses ways we can remove harmful assumptions from the way we interact with each other.

We know this guide is not exhaustive, and language is constantly evolving. Polite and thoughtful questions are typically the best way to get accurate information rather than basing decisions on assumptions. Be aware that people may not always welcome questions, and they are not obligated to respond.

Gender

Using gender inclusive language can provide critical affirmation to students across the gender spectrum. One way to achieve this is to take gender out of text where it's unnecessary. Below are some examples of ways you can rephrase language to be more inclusive.

Instead of...	At Grace, we say...
"boys and girls", "guys", "ladies and gentlemen"	people, folks, friends, readers, mathematicians...
when reading a book, rather than "the boy/girl on this page…"	child, person, character
sweetheart/honey/similar pet names	child's name or "child/friend in the blue shirt"

using a boy/girl pattern (e.g. for lining up)	group by types of shoes, alphabetical, for example
boys' /girls' colors/toys	use the name of the item or color
assuming gender based on stereotypes (hair, clothing, appearance)	respectfully ask how they identify if familiar establishing a culture of sharing affirming pronouns in class

Outdated Terms

- **Hermaphrodite** - *Intersex* is the appropriate word for someone born with ambiguous genitalia that is indiscernably male or female
- **Transexual/Transvestite/Crossdresser** - outdated terms to refer to what is now incorporated under the umbrella of transgender.

For More Information:

Cisgender
The term applied to individuals whose gender identity, or their internal sense of their own gender (male or female), aligns with the sex (girl/woman or boy/man) they were assigned at birth based on outward physical appearance. This term comes from the latin root cis-, meaning "same side of". In this context, cisgender is opposite of **transgender**, or someone whose gender identity does not align with their sex assigned at birth. We use cisgender to convey that everyone has a gender identity, and to avoid the assumption that cisgender is the "norm" or standard and transgender is the outlier or an abnormality.
Video Link: [Teaching Trans: What is Cisgender?](#)

Pronouns:
Pronouns are used to identify someone when not saying their name. Common pronouns include he, him, his, and she, her, hers. For folks all along the gender spectrum, using the right pronouns can be affirming to their gender identity, or on the flip side can be detrimental if they are misgendered. One set of pronouns gaining common use is the singular version of they, them, and theirs, used to describe someone who does not feel comfortable using, or does not identify with, binary gendered pronouns. In the classroom, it is good practice to state affirming pronouns when introducing oneself, which allows asking what pronouns others use to be a mutual act of respect.
Video Link: [Gender Identity and Pronouns](#)

Non-Binary:
Non-binary individuals identify as neither man nor woman, both man and woman, or a combination of both binary genders. Non-binary identified folks can, but don't necessarily, fall under the umbrella of transgender, and can also identify as genderqueer, agender, and/or gender non-conforming, to name a few. Non-binary individuals may use the pronouns they, them, theirs.
Video Link: [Range of Gender Identities](#)

Gender Identity vs. Gender Expression vs. Sexual Orientation:
Gender identity refers to an individual's sense of their own gender. Often an individual's gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth (cisgender), but sometimes it doesn't (transgender/nonbinary). Gender expression is how an individual chooses to express their gender identity. Gender expression can range from masculine to feminine and everything in between, and can employ dress, make up, mannerisms, speech, etc. Gender identity and expression can be linked to, but doesn't necessarily determine, one's sexual orientation, which is whom someone is attracted to. Sexual orientation solidifies around when puberty starts, where gender identity is developed as early as toddler years.
Resource: [Genderbread Person](#)

Families

Families are formed and structured in many ways. At Grace Church School, we use inclusive language that reflects this diversity. It's important to refrain from making assumptions about who kids live with, who cares for them, whether they sleep in the same place every night, whether they see their parents, etc.

Instead of...	At Grace, we say...
Mom and Dad	grown-ups, folks, or family
parents	grown-ups, folks, family, ...and guardians
nanny/babysitter	caregiver, guardian
is adopted	was adopted
husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend	spouse/partner/significant other

Outdated Terms

- **Traditional Family** - we actively try to undo notions of a "typical" or "normal" family structure, each family is unique

- **"Real" parents** - a preferred term is *birth parents*

For More Information

Video Link: [Different Kinds of Families](#)

Sexual Orientation

Human sexuality exists along a spectrum. At Grace Church School, we use inclusive language that acknowledges all orientations and identities. Be conscious of heteronormative assumptions; i.e., boys have or want girlfriends, girls have or want boyfriends. Avoid phrases like "ladies' man," "boys will love those eyelashes," or "your mom and dad must be so proud." People get to love who they want to love. Avoid making assumptions about how adults identify themselves in the present or how children might identify themselves in the future. Sexuality can be fluid along the course of a person's life.

In this situation...	Consider responding with...
someone says "a boy can't marry a boy" or "a girl can't marry a girl"	"People can love and commit to whomever they please, it's their choice who they marry."
If someone articulates sexual orientation is a choice rather than an identity	"Who we love/are attracted to is part of who we are"
What if you hear someone say, "Oh, he's gay."	"It's not okay to make assumptions about someone's identity. If he came out to you, please respect his privacy."
How to support people who are coming out	Thank them for choosing to tell you as they've identified you as a safe and trusting person. Try not to respond with "I always knew" or "I had no idea". Ask them how you can continue to support their coming out process.

Outdated Terms

- **Sexual Preference** -- a preference implies a choice in the matter, when sexual orientation is more often than not something we're born with

- **Homosexual** -- gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, etc. are more appropriate for individuals, and LGBTQ+ is most up to date when talking about the larger community

How Do I Use This Word?

Queer (LGBTQ+)

Reclaimed from being a derogatory term used against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or gender non-conforming individuals, queer serves as an umbrella term for any identity that is not heterosexual and/or cisgender. The label represents a deliberately inclusive and political identification meant to encompass a growing view of gender and sexuality as several spectra as opposed to strict binaries.

Heterosexism/Heteronormativity

The assumption that heterosexuality is the natural or default form of sexuality, and is inherently good or inevitable. An example of heterosexism is when straight individuals' sexuality is implied, and only LGBTQ+ people have to "come out" and declare their sexuality publicly in order to be acknowledged or legitimized.

Race/Ethnicity

People have racial/ethnic identities that are personal and familial. At Grace Church School we work to be mindful of the language we use in order to avoid making assumptions about people as we engage in conversation that touches on race and ethnicity.

Instead of...	Say...
Diverse/minority	Person of color (if how they self-identify), marginalized identity/population
What are you? Where are you from?	What is your cultural/ethnic background? Where are your ancestors/is your family from?
What race are you?	Ask how they (self-)identify
"They faced discrimination because of their skin color/race/etc."	"They faced discrimination because of racism" (a person's identity is never the problem, it's the systems of oppression)

Outdated Terms

This is by no means an exhaustive list. We welcome any additions of outdated terms with clarifying language.

- **Colorblind**—No one is color blind as it pertains to race. We see the skin tones of people and assumptions are made about how someone identifies racially.
- **Caucasian**—The correct term is White. White is a more accurate description of light-skinned people of European descent.
- **Diverse person/student**—referencing a person of color. A person is not diverse. A group of people can be diverse.
- **Colormute**— The act of avoiding saying someone's race. Instead use, "A person appears to be [insert race]." We can't always be sure of someone's race based solely on appearance. If you really need to know how someone identifies racially, you could follow up and ask that person.
- **Colored people** -- in being consistent with people-first language, we use *people of color*

For More Information

Race vs. Ethnicity vs. Nationality

Race is any number of socially constructed categories based on antiquated metrics, most frequently physical features such as hair texture and skin color, and geographic heritage. Ethnicity is determined by geographic and cultural commonalities including religion, language, music, food, and geographic ties that have been passed down through ancestry. Nationality is determined by where your or your family's citizenship lies. For example, an individual could racially identify as black, be ethnically Haitian/Caribbean, and claim the United States as their nationality.

Video Link: [Race, Nationality, Ethnicity and Jellybeans](#)

Religion

At Grace Church School, we work to be mindful of the language we use in order to avoid making assumptions about people as we engage in conversation that touches on religion.

Instead of...	Say...
What religion are you?	Are any religious/faith traditions important to you?
What did you get for (any holiday)? What are you going to be for Halloween?	Do you celebrate holidays?
Merry Christmas!/Happy Holidays!	Have a great break!

Being Able

At Grace Church School, we work to be mindful of the language we use to avoid making assumptions about people as we engage in conversation that touches on ability.   One way to do this is to remember person-focused language. Rather than name that person *is a* difference ("a dyslexic") person *has* a condition or difference ("has dyslexia"). Additionally, we want to avoid using a person's condition to describe something as negative.

Instead of...	Say...
A person is learning disabled...	A person has a learning difference, or better, a specific difference
A person is handicapped	A person has a physical disability or is differently abled
I am "so OCD"	You might refer to your habits (I am so hyper-focused on organization) rather than use a mental health condition as an adjective

Outdated Terms
- **Handicapped**
- **"Slow learner"**
- **Special needs**
- **Mentally impaired/Disturbed**
- **Has a defect**
- **Retarded**

For More Information

[Americans with Disabilities Act - Effective Communication](#)

[Best Practices for Avoiding Ableist Terminology](#)

[Language Guidelines for Inclusive Emergency Preparedness, Response, Mitigation and Recovery](#)

Socioeconomics

At Grace Church School, we work to be mindful of the language we use in order to avoid making assumptions about people and their available resources as we engage in conversations that touch on socioeconomics.

Instead of...	Say...
Where did you go for break?	Name something you learned during break. Tell me something that happened during break.
Everyone has (insert item)	Some people have… Not everyone has…
Assuming transportation to school	How did you get to school today?
Assumptions about material things/access	(Be sensitive that kids might not have what they need at home)

Glossary of Identity and Shared Value Terms

Affinity or Alliance Group

In affinity group spaces, those that share an identity, such as race, religion or gender, come together with an advisor to discuss the rewards and challenges they share. In alliance groups, community members of all identities who share a common interest, such as discussing LGBTQ rights or advancing women in science, meet to learn and to think about how they might further educate their community about building a safe, inclusive and equitable school.

Antiracism

Anti-racism includes active policies, practices, and programs that oppose racism by attempting to dismantle the systems that uphold a hierarchy based on skin color privilege. Schools and institutions who seek to develop an anti-racist lens must examine their structures and practices as well as develop skills and tools for their members that may help recognize and undo racism in the community and in the world.

Video Link: Are you racist? 'No' isn't a good enough answer, Antiracist vs. Not Racist

Equity

Sometimes confused with equality, equity refers to outcomes, while equality connotes equal treatment. Each family brings a unique set of skills and needs to school. Because of the history of discrimination and bias against marginalized people, equal treatment may be insufficient for or even detrimental to equitable outcomes. An example is accommodations for students with disabilities, which treat some students differently in order to ensure their equitable access to education.

Gender Equity

Gender equity refers to the movement and ideology that espouses equitable treatment and civil rights for all people regardless of their gender identity. Related to movements promoting women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights, gender equity is unique in its call to include all genders in the movement for civil rights and ending gender bias.

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias refers to unconscious or "automatic" responses during social interactions

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that discriminate based on identity.   Developed at a young age by living in a society that has bias and discrimination present, the most well-known research on the subject focuses on implicit attitudes toward members of socially stigmatized groups, such as African-Americans, women, and the LGBTQ community. Members of stigmatized or stereotyped groups might have bias against their own performance when surrounded by evidence of implicit bias, as described by researcher Dr. Claude Steele in his work on *stereotype threat.*

Video Link: [Implicit Bias: Peanut Butter, Jelly, and Racism](#)

Inclusion

Inclusion refers to intentional practices and policies that promote the full participation and sense of belonging of every student, family, and employee. Operating with the assumption that we work in a multicultural and diverse institution, inclusion involves critically examining events, curriculum, facilities, and gatherings so that each community member's access to participation is considered and accommodated.

Institutional Racism

Institutional racism describes social patterns that create oppressive and negative conditions for identifiable groups on the basis of race or ethnicity. Oppression may come from the institution's policies or practices, and can include institutions like the governments, schools or courts. Institutional racism shouldn't be confused with individual racism, which is directed against one or a few individuals. Institutional racism creates patterns that affect groups at a large scale, such as when the enforcement of a law is more heavily imposed on one racial group, or when access to an institution is denied to a racial group.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups. Refers to the analytical framework coined by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw through which the relationship among systems of oppression can be understood. African American women made an early contribution to this analysis in the 19th Century. Recognizing that they experienced racism and sexism differently from both black men and white women even while they shared commonalities with both, they argued that a struggle that did not simultaneously address sexism and racism would only perpetuate both. Since then, social justice

movements have worked to incorporate this framework for stronger bridge-building between causes.

Video Link: Intersectionality 101, The Urgency of Intersectionality

Microaggression

Microaggressions are subtle words, cues, and/or behaviors that insult, invalidate, or exclude marginalized group members. Microaggressions focus on the impact of hurtful words and actions regardless of the intentions of the offender. Sometimes couched in well-intentioned comments, they further a prejudice or false assumption about the marginalized group. Over time, with frequency and consistency in targeting, they can foster a negative sense of self. An example is when commenting on someone's looks by saying "you're pretty for a black girl," implying black people are not normally beautiful.

Video Link: Derald Wing Sue on Microaggressions

Race

Growing up, we learn that race is a label that denotes skin color or geographic origin. We also learn that this label carries deeply problematic stereotypes and misunderstandings. While characteristics like skin color and hair texture vary among people, race is not a fixed biological essence passed on through the genes. For example, while we associate "whiteness" with European ancestry and light skin color, not all Europeans of light skin color were considered "white" as recently as the early 20th century. Racial categories are specific to the context of a culture, not to biological traits. Ideas about race are culturally and socially transmitted and form the basis of racism, racial classification, and often complex racial identities. While sociologists agree that race is a social construct, racism, or discrimination based on race, is real. Therefore, we hope to educate our students about the history of racial categorization and its consequences in their lives, encouraging racial literacy.

Video Link: The Myth of Race, Debunked

White Privilege/White Supremacy

Privilege is best understood as the system of advantages that one has. These advantages are sometimes at the expense of another group, often due to historical discrimination. Some privileges are earned, such as achieving a masters degree, but some are unearned, such as being born with light colored skin or being born male. Historically, the unearned privilege of whiteness and maleness allowed some to enter universities to earn their

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education, so an unearned privilege helped facilitate getting an earned privilege.   In terms of race and skin color, white people have unearned privileges in many instances such as being preferred home buyers, being perceived as trustworthy by the police, or being able to see people who share their heritage in history books and in the media. The system that maintains that privilege and power for white people is called white supremacy.

Video Link: [Deconstructing White Privilege](#)