Relationship Matters

Gender, Sexuality, and Inclusion — A Resource for Inclusive Practices

At Relationship Matters (RM), we are committed to building a caring, compassionate, and just society—our vision. We believe that embracing and understanding diversity is fundamental to fostering true inclusion.

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Counselling & Mediation

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Counselling & Mediation

Discover how Relationship Matters can make a difference in your life. Whether you're seeking support, guidance, to join our team, or simply looking to connect, we are here to help.

Reach out today.

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Email us: **Relationship Matters Melbourne City**

Reception Hours:
Monday – Thursday: 8.30am – 8.00pm
Friday: 8.30am – 5.00pm

Please note:
We also offer services at a variety of locations.
Visit our website at **www.relationshipmatters.org.au** to find the nearest one that can assist you.
Your well-being is our priority. Get in touch now and take the first step toward positive change.

Introduction

At RM, we are working toward a caring, compassionate, and just society—our vision. We believe that understanding diversity is key to fostering true inclusion.

"We all bring different aspects of ourselves which, together, make us who we are. They shape the way we see ourselves and how others see us. This is diversity. But to bring out the benefits that diversity offers us – we need 'inclusion'. Inclusion is about creating an environment that enables a mix of people to be and act together effectively with respect."

— Diversity Council Australia

At RM, we're committed to making our workplace safer, more respectful, and more inclusive for everyone. This guide is here to help. It offers practical insights into using inclusive and respectful language when working with LGBTQIA+ people and explores how we can create a welcoming and supportive environment together.

Think of this as more than just a guide—it's a step toward meaningful change. By embracing these principles, we can ensure that RM is a place where everyone feels valued, heard, and empowered to be themselves.

What we mean by inclusion

"Inclusion is about each of us being respected as part of a group, connected to others, accepted and valued for just being who we are."
— Diversity Council Australia

"LGBTQIA+ inclusion means that everyone is accepted for who they are, no matter who they love. But most importantly, those we accept have representation, and their ideas and stories are allowed to come to the front, not held in the background."
— Diversity Council Australia

At RM, inclusion means creating a safe, welcoming, and supportive environment for people of all gender and sexual identities. We achieve this through the following actions:

- Celebrating diversity and empowering all, aligned with our RM Value of Equity and Inclusion
- Maintaining a zero-tolerance policy towards harassment and abuse of LGBTQIA+ individuals
- Seeking advice from people with lived experience and applying an LGBTQIA+ perspective in decision-making across the organisation
- Ensuring our leaders are active LGBTQIA+ allies
- Incorporating flags, posters, rainbow lanyards, and other symbols as visible commitments to inclusion
- Using gender-neutral and inclusive language in all key organisational conversations and documents
- Providing training on inclusive practices, including the use of pronouns and supporting disclosure
- Actively seeking diverse candidates during recruitment
- Supporting events that recognise and celebrate key days, such as Wear It Purple Day, and participating in the Midsumma Pride March
- With permission, featuring stories and testimonials from LGBTIQA+ employees and clients in our communications
- Being a signatory to Changing the Landscape
- Continuously using research to stay informed and improve our practices
- Actively inviting feedback to ensure we exceed expectations and identify areas for improvement, while maintaining our commitment to Rainbow Tick accreditation

At RM, we strive to ensure everyone is:

RECOGNISED for their individuality and empowered to be their authentic selves
CONNECTED with supportive services and teams where they feel a sense of belonging
ENGAGED by contributing their unique insights and skills
EMPOWERED through equal opportunities and access to resources for growth

The words we use

RM looks to the Diversity Council of Australia and National LGBTI Health Alliance for guidance in inclusive language. We have elected to use:

Cisgender: A person who exclusively identifies with the gender assigned to them at birth.

Gender diverse: An umbrella term used to describe gender identities that demonstrate a diversity of expression beyond the binary framework of male and female.

Gender identity: Our internal sense of self, which may be masculine, feminine, a mix of both, or fluid.

Gender marker: Markers that denote someone's gender identity (e.g., M, F, or X).

Gender pronouns: Pronouns used to describe gender (e.g., he/him/his, they/them/theirs, she/her/hers).

Heteronormative: A view that promotes heterosexuality as the preferred or "normal" sexual orientation.

Misgendering: The deliberate or accidental use of a pronoun, title, or other gendered language that does not align with a person's gender identity.

Misnaming/deadnaming: The deliberate or accidental use of a previous or legal name instead of a person's chosen name.

Non-binary: A broad term referring to gender identities and/or experiences that aren't exclusively male or female.

"Identify with their gender assigned at birth."

– CFCA Resource Sheet: LGBTIQA+ Communities – Glossary of Common Terms

"LGBTQIA+ is the inclusive umbrella that recognises the most common categories within gender and sexuality diverse populations, and people with innate variations of sex characteristics: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer-identifying people, intersex and asexual, with the '+' being an inclusive and intentional way of representing all identities and experiences that are not represented by the letters. There is no single LGBTQIA+ community, rather a plurality of identities and experiences."

– National LGBTI Health Alliance, 2013b

What makes people feel safe

“Creating cultural safety for LGBTQIA+ individuals means promoting visibility and fostering connections. It’s about building an environment where empathy, understanding, care, and respect are paramount. When cultural safety is prioritised, LGBTQIA+ people can see themselves reflected in various ways when interacting with organisations, services, and businesses. Ultimately, what LGBTQIA+ people seek is to feel that they belong, are valued as members of the community, and that their preferences matter. An organisation that prioritises creating a welcoming, inclusive, and culturally safe environment enables individuals to be out and open about who they are, knowing that they will be treated with understanding, dignity, and respect.”

— The Equality Project

RM is committed to fostering this type of organisation.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the way in which people experience overlapping forms of discrimination or disadvantage based on attributes such as Aboriginality; age; disability; ethnicity; gender identity; race; religion; and sexual orientation.

Intersectionality recognises that the causes of disadvantage or discrimination do not exist independently, but intersect and overlap with gender inequality, magnifying the severity and frequency of the impacts while also raising barriers to support.

www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/applying-intersectionality

HELPFUL TIPS

Understanding intersectionality can help us better support people who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Respectful communication

Using inclusive language is a way to respect and acknowledge diversity, build trust, and reduce discrimination that trans, gender diverse and non-binary people frequently face.

We know that people express their gender and sexuality in different ways including their use of pronouns and names. It is important to check in on what someone's preferences are and how they would like to be known.

Respectful communication includes not making assumptions about a person's gender but if you do misgender or misname someone, acknowledge your mistake by politely apologising and continue the conversation. While asking about someone's pronouns or gender identity may feel uncomfortable, it is more uncomfortable to misgender someone.

HELPFUL TIPS

Try asking: 'What pronouns do you use?' or 'How do you describe your gender identity?' Avoid asking what terms someone 'prefers,' as this implies choice. Gender identity isn't a preference—it's simply who someone is."

Appendix: Example Scripts (See Attachment 1)

Disclosure, data collection & use

Disclosure, Data Collection & Use

Disclosure refers to a person voluntarily sharing their own personal and/or sensitive information. This sharing may include information relating to their sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status, relationship status, and/or other details that may not be commonly known. RM encourages and supports people to disclose when they wish to. RM will always uphold the disclosure preferences of individuals, except where safety or law requires otherwise.

What We Ask and Why

RM invites people to discuss their gender identity, intersex status, and sexual orientation with us if they wish. Such information will only be collected from the person themselves or their nominated representative (where relevant) and by authorised RM staff.

RM collects information on people's gender identity, intersex variation, and sexual orientation to assist us in ensuring our service and employment practices are the best they can be, holistic, and meet the unique needs of LGBTQIA+ people.

RM is committed to ensuring that our clients and team are made aware that any information they provide is done so voluntarily, and that information they choose to disclose will be treated with respect and confidentiality. It will also be available for them to view. People are under no obligation to answer any question we ask of them.

When Not to Ask

RM will not ask for gender identity, intersex status, and sexual orientation-related information:

- When it is not needed for providing high-quality, safe services or employment
- If a person indicates that they prefer not to say
- When it may unintentionally reveal someone's gender identity, intersex status, or sexual orientation
- If it has the potential to adversely impact someone's safety or wellbeing

How We Use Inclusivity Data

Inclusivity data assists RM in:

- Providing the best services and employment practices to meet people's unique needs and preferences
- Planning and (re)designing our services and ways of working (business systems) to meet the needs of people in all their diversity
- Meeting our regulatory and contractual reporting requirements
- Advocating for change where external datasets are not inclusive
- Advocating for systemic change to challenge structures that may adversely impact LGBTQIA+ people
- We know that people are more likely to disclose their gender identity when they feel safe, valued, and supported. Collecting information in an affirming and respectful way sends a message that LGBTQIA+ people are recognised, acknowledged, and that their preferences matter.
- It's important to communicate that any information people provide will be stored securely, remain confidential, and only be shared with others if they have given express permission. RM supports people in not answering questions about their sexuality or gender if that is their wish. People can change or remove information at any time.
- People from some cultural and religious communities, as well as those from regional areas, may also face additional disclosure, anonymity, and confidentiality concerns.

How to be an ally

"Everyone, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or sex characteristics, can be an ally by supporting and advocating for the equal treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, intersex and queer (LGBTQIA+) people.

Being a good ally means championing LGBTQIA+ communities, being aware of inequality and calling it out where it exists, and creating safe and inclusive spaces. Above all, it means listening to the communities' experiences, and affirming and elevating their voices.

It's important to know that our LGBTQIA+ communities are diverse and have varied experiences. LGBTQIA+ people may also face different layers and types of discrimination or disadvantage based on the many intersecting parts of their identities, including ethnicity, language, faith, class, socioeconomic status, ability, and age.

The journey to become an ally can be uncomfortable, as it involves being willing to confront and regularly check-in on your own assumptions, prejudices, and biases. Be okay with that, and keep trying, as by doing your part to become the best ally you can be, you help create a stronger and more inclusive Victoria."

Source: How to be an active ally for LGBTIQA+ people | vic.gov.au

Here's some ways to be an ally:

- **RESPECT** that people have the right to define their gender, and **affirm peoples gender identities**, pronouns, and chosen names.
- **LISTEN** to the experiences of **trans, gender diverse and non-binary people**, and avoid speaking on their behalf.
- **CHALLENGE transphobic** jokes and comments, to create an environment of accountability. Don't be a bystander.
- Do your **RESEARCH** about **LGBTQIA+** issues and current affairs. Stay informed by looking at books, blogs, and reliable websites.
- **CONSULT** with **trans, gender diverse** and **non-binary** people to ensure services are effective and inclusive.
- **SHARE** that you're an **ally**, and why. This will help to educate others and promote inclusion.

Inclusive Language

- QLife and QLife-Tip-Sheets-Glossary.pdf
- https://www.vic.gov.au/inclusive-language-guide
- Pronouns — TransHub
- Video: Guide to Pronouns | Minus18
- Pronouns — TransHub
- PRONOUNS+++MISGENDERING.pdf

Legal Complaints/Support

- Australian Human Rights Commission: https://www.humanrights.gov.au
- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission: https://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au
- St Kilda Legal Service: https://www.skls.org.au
- Q+Law: https://www.fls.org.au | Email: Qlawadmin@fls.org.au

Gender Affirming Healthcare

- Victorian Trans and Gender Diverse Community Health & Medical Affirmation Services: https://www.yourcommunityhealth.org.au/service-access/transand-gender-diverse-health
- Equinox Gender Diverse Health Centre: (03) 9416 2889 | https://www.equinox.org.au
- Monash Gender Clinic: (03) 9556 5216 | https://www.monashhealth.org/services/gender-clinic
- Royal Children's Hospital Gender Service: (03) 9345 5034 | https://www.rch.org.au/adolescentmedicine/gender-service
- AUSPATH (Service Providers): https://www.auspath.org.au

Additional Resources

- Trans Hub: https://transhub.org.au
- The Equality Project: https://www.equalityproject.org.au
- Home | Minus18: https://minus18.org.au
- Zoe Belle Gender Collective: https://www.zbgc.org.au
- YGender: https://www.ygender.org.au
- Equinox Gender Diverse Health Centre: https://www.equinox.org.au
- Churchill Recommendations on Best Practice in Trans and Gender Diverse Health: https://www.leaphq.org
- Transgender Victoria: https://transgendervictoria.com
- Private Lives Matter: https://www.latrobe.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1185885/Private-Lives-3.pdf
- Say It Out Loud Directory: https://www.queerspace.org.au
- Drummond Street Services "Queerspace": https://www.queerspace.org.au
- Thorne Harbour Health: https://www.thorneharbour.org
- Rainbow Health Victoria: https://www.rainbowhealthvic.org.au
- Rainbow Network: https://www.rainbownetwork.com.au
- Rainbow Door (LGBTIQA+ Specialist Helpline): 1800 729 367 | https://www.rainbowdoor.org.au

Appendix - Attachment 1: Example Scripts

Example Scripts from Respectful Communication

The following are example questions to assist in talking with people about their gender identity, intersex status and sexual orientation. Use them as a guide and adapt as the situation requires. People are under no obligation to answer any question we ask of them.

Introductory questions	*I appreciate that many of the questions we ask are of a personal and sensitive nature. Having information about your gender identity, intersex status and sexual orientation will help us provide you with appropriate services and support. This information will also support our advocacy work and improve the way our services can be provided in the future.* *We know that everyone is different, so I'm going to ask a few questions about how you identify, such as your cultural background or sexuality. You don't have to answer these questions if you don't want to, and I want you to know we keep this information confidential and only ask to ensure we can be respectful of who you are and provide appropriate assistance to you.* *Is this the first time you have told anyone this information?*
Questions about gender identity, intersex status and sexual orientation	*What is your sexual orientation?* *We ask these questions of everyone. You do not have to share this information with us, but you are welcome to discuss your gender identity and sexual orientation with us at any time. I would like to respect your gender and sexuality; do you mind if I ask you a few questions about these?* *How do you describe your gender? For example, I identify as a man.* *Were you born with a variation of sex characteristics (sometimes called an intersex variation)?* *Would you like to disclose an intersex variation?*
Questions about pronouns	*We use pronouns when referring to people/groups of people. Personal pronouns are important to a person's identity. In English, personal pronouns are often gendered. Using correct pronouns is like using a person's correct name, and shows you acknowledge and respect their identity.* *What pronouns, if any, do you use for yourself?* *For example, I identify as female, and my pronoun is she/her. When other people talk about me they use these words in place of my name "That is Jane, she is a great worker"*
Questions about partners	*Do you have a partner or partners?* *Are you in a relationship currently?* *What is your partner's name?* *How does your partner describe their gender identity?* *Are you co-parenting your children with anyone?* *Do you feel safe with your partner(s)?*
Closing Comments	*RM is committed to providing a safe and welcoming place for all LGBTIQA+ people. Thank you for trusting me with your information about who you are. I understand it can be really hard to tell people, especially strangers like me.*[1]

1. Source: Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand. 2021. LGBTIQA+ Inclusive Practice and Data Collection Guide. p16-17.

Appendix - Attachment 1: Example Scripts

Some people introduce their own pronoun first. For example: *"Hello, I'm Jayda, I'll be your counsellor today and my pronouns are they, them, theirs. Would you like me to record what pronouns or titles you would like to use?"*

If you make a mistake, you could say: *"I'm sorry for using the wrong pronoun/name. I didn't mean to disrespect you."*

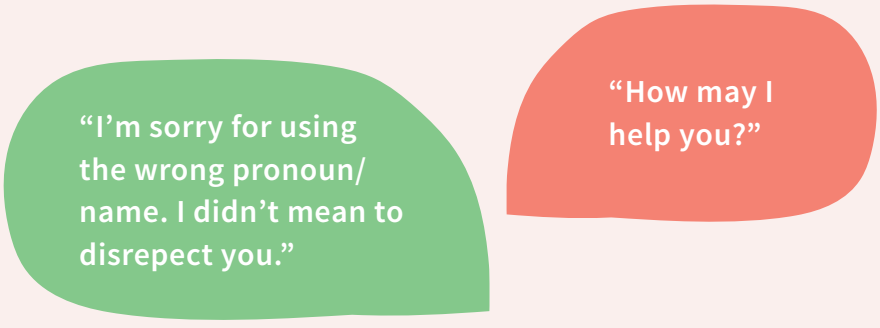
When addressing someone you don't know, one way to avoid misgendering is to avoid using terms that indicate gender. For example, you can simply ask *"How may I help you?"* instead of *"How may I help you, sir?"* or use their chosen name instead of *"Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms".*

If you are talking about someone who you don't yet know, you can avoid misgendering by using the term *"they"* instead of *"he/she"*. For example, *"They are here for their appointment" or "The client is here for their appointment".*

Once someone has disclosed their chosen name and pronouns it is important to use their preferences, even when they are not around. This includes all future direct correspondence and documentation.[2]

When discussing disclosure and data collection, you may find the following prompts helpful

- *"Some of these questions are quite personal and you don't have to answer them if you don't feel comfortable. The reason we ask them is so we can be sure we can provide the best support / service to you. You don't have to answer these questions if you don't want to, and I want you to know that we keep this information confidential and only ask to ensure that we can be respectful of who you are"*
- *"We want to support LGBTI+ clients in the best possible way we can. By asking these questions and recording the diversity of our clients we can continually improve and update our service."*
- *"With any of these questions you can chose one of the options here or tell me how you want to describe your gender identity/sexual orientation and I can write that. Or you can just pick 'prefer not to say'"*
- *"If you're comfortable talking about it, how would you describe your gender/sexual orientation? Thanks for that."*
- *"Would you like me to use your affirmed name and pronoun in the referral letter I write?" or "Would you like information on your affirmed name and pronouns shared to other staff members?"*



2. Banyule Community Health. (2023) An Introductory Guide to Working Inclusively with Individuals who Identify as LGBTIQA+ (Version 2)

Appendix - Attachment 1: Example Scripts

Best practices for a gender-affirming environment

Best Practice	Examples
When talking about a person whose gender identity and prnouncs you don ot know, avoid gendered terms. Use gender-neutral words such as “they” or their chosen name.	*“Paige is here for their appointment”* *“It’s Jo’s first day of work, they will be working in the allied health team”.*
Don’t assume gender and pronouns. Always ask, with discretion.	*“How do you currently describe your gender identity?”* *“What pronouns do you use?”* *“Hi, I’m Tommy, and I use he/him prnouns. What pronouns do you use?”*
Educate people who need more information about why we ask about gender identity	*Consumer: “Why are you aksing this question?”* *Response: “We don’t like to make assumptions about people’s gender identities; Banyule Community Health is inclusive of trans and gender diverse consumers. While we ask this of everyone, it may not be relevant to you”.*
Ask respectfully about consumer names if they don’t match our records. Always ask if someone has a name they would prefer we use.	*“Could you file be under another name?”* *“Maybe the name we have on our system is the same as the one on your Medicare card. Would you like me to add another name to our file?”*
Apologise if you make a mistake.	*“I’m sorry for using the wrong pronoun. I didn’t mean to disrespect you. Let me try again”.*
Only ask for information that is required to provide the service.	Ask yourself: What do I need to know? How can I ask in a sensitive way?
If someone asks to use the bathroom, don’t make assumptions about which one they would prefer.	Point to all available bathrooms.
When addressing groups of peeople, don’t use gendered terms like *“ladies and gentlemen”.*	*“Good morning, everyone, thanks for coming”.*

https://bchs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/An-Introductory-Guide-to-Working-Inclusively-with-Individuals-who-Identify-as-LGBTIQA-May-2023.pdf

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1300 543 396

contact@relationshipmatters.com.au