



holistic

Inclusive Language Toolkit

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STARTING THE CONVERSATION

The mission of Holistic is to elevate both people and companies so employees can bring their whole selves to work. A simple way to foster an equitable environment is to be cognizant of how we conduct the conversation surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Here are some tips on how to get started:

1

Avoid making assumptions about the identities people hold and how those identities impact them. Acknowledge to yourself that we all hold certain beliefs and work towards dismantling them.

2

Respect unique experiences. People with the same identity may have vastly different experiences, both with respect to that identity and in life overall. Rather than assuming an identity has a universally shared story, allow people to tell you their own.

3

Let people define their own identity. There are countless terms to define each aspect of a person's identity. Use the terminology they provide you with. If you do not understand what something means, we encourage you to respectfully ask for clarification and seek to understand.

4

Let people disclose information on their own time. People will open up about their identities if and when they feel comfortable. It is still possible to have an enriching conversation about identity without knowing the specifics of someone else's.

5

Speak from personal experiences. Use "I" statements to share your thoughts and feelings. Rather than speaking for an entire group, speaking from your own experiences acknowledges that just because you identify one way, does not mean you understand the experiences of all others who identify the same way.

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

6

Assume best intentions. Assume that everyone is coming into the conversation with the intention to learn, not offend. People are attempting to balance being honest, vulnerable, and imperfect with standards of perfection and mastery.

7

Acknowledge your impact. If you offend someone else, acknowledge the impact you had on them without getting defensive.

8

Understand your own identities, privileges, and biases. Be aware of your own identities and the privileges, difficulties, and preconceived notions that accompany them. Self awareness regarding who you are and what you need to work on is essential.

9

There is a time and place to talk about these matters, and it is often contextual. Read the situation to the best of your ability and recognize it may not always be a good time for a tough conversation. Both parties should feel comfortable for the best possible outcome.

10

Embrace discomfort. These conversations can be difficult to navigate. You may be faced with facts, stories, or other topics that make you uncomfortable. Embrace this discomfort instead of trying reconcile it -- it indicates that you are learning and growing.

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE

The mission of Holistic is to elevate both people and companies so employees can bring their whole selves to work. With countless definitions floating around, finding the right language during a conversation can be a challenge.

The Learning the Language section of the Inclusive Language Toolkit serves to help familiarize you with common diversity, equity, and inclusion terminology and guide you through meaningful discussion.

Term	Meaning
Ally	Someone who does not identify with a particular marginalized identity but joins that group in the fight for justice and equality. Allies must decenter themselves from the conversation, and use their privilege carefully and effectively to push for social change without speaking over marginalized voices.
Anti-racist	An individual that is anti-racist actively challenges oppressive systems, policies, and practices as well as their own biases. Anti-racist is to be distinguished from 'non-racist' because it requires the individual to play a more active role in dismantling racist systems and attitudes.
Blind spot	The hidden attitudes and biases held by everyone, regardless of education or virtue.
Colorism	Discrimination and prejudice against individuals with darker skin, often between members of the same race or across different marginalized groups.
DEI: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion	Diversity stands for the presence of difference, Equity stands for the process of ensuring fairness and justice, and Inclusion stands for providing equal access and opportunities to all. Together, these terms represent creating a fair, accessible, and safe environment that allows all to thrive.
Equality vs. Equity	Equality refers to everyone having the same opportunities and giving everyone the exact same resources. Equity refers to the process of ensuring fairness and justice and distributing resources based on needs. Equity recognizes that each person has different circumstances and that resources need to be distributed differently in order to reach a fair outcome.
Gender Inclusive Language	The use of language that is not gender specific. Primarily, this includes avoiding assumptions about individuals' gender pronouns and addressing large groups with gender neutral language (i.e. "folks" instead of "ladies and gentleman").

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE

Term	Meaning
Gender pronouns	The set of third person pronouns that an individual prefers others use when referencing to their gender (or lack thereof). Examples include “he/him/his”, “she/her/hers”, and “they/them/theirs”, although there are many others.
Intersectionality	The interrelated nature of various identities (gender, race, sexuality, etc), the combination of which creates distinctive (and often compounding) forms of discrimination.
Marginalized communities	Groups that experience social, political, and economic prejudice and discrimination due to unequal power relationships across social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions.
Microaggressions	Brief, “normal” comments that appear harmless to most observers, but transmit negative/harmful messages to people of marginalized identities. These comments may reinforce stereotypes, express discomfort toward the minority group or their culture, deny the discrimination the marginalized group faces, and more.
Mx.	A gender neutral honorific for those who do not wish to be identified by their gender or who do not identify as a particular gender.
Neurodiversity	This term refers to the differences that exist within the human brain regarding sociability, mood, attention, and other mental functions. Neurodiverse conditions are developmental and include (but are not limited to) individuals with ADHD, Autism, and Dyslexia.
Tokenism	Making a minimal or purely symbolic effort to be inclusive. In the workforce, this can show up in multiple ways. Examples include recruiting small numbers of diverse candidates to give the false perception of diversity at-large, inviting a particular employee or set of employees to a client pitch or presentation to represent a certain group such as race or gender, or including images of employees in web or marketing collateral that is not representative of the actual employee population.
Unconscious bias	Deeply ingrained stereotypes/prejudices that people form outside of conscious awareness, usually toward marginalized populations. They are formed over time and capable of influencing behavior without the biased individual's realization.

TERMINOLOGY TOOLKIT

The mission of Holistic is to elevate both people and companies so employees can bring their whole selves to work. With countless definitions floating around, finding the right language to talk about identity can be a challenge.

The Terminology Toolkit includes terminology that is frequently used when describing someone based on their identities. If you aren't sure which term to use when talking about someone's identities, ask people how they prefer to describe themselves.

Term	Meaning
Black vs. African American	Black is a race, which aims to identify people primarily by physical characteristics, while African American is an ethnicity which refers to a shared cultural identity. Black can encompass multiple ethnicities from the African Diaspora. An individual can be Black, but not necessarily African American.
Black Lives Matter (BLM)	Black Lives Matter is an organized social movement aiming to eradicate police brutality and state-sanctioned violence against all black people. 'Black Lives Matter' as a slogan aims to emphasize that the lives of black people are valuable and deserving of equal rights, protection, and justice.
Cisgender	Those whose gender identities match the sex they were assigned at birth.
Genderqueer/Nonbinary	Gender identities that are not exclusively masculine or feminine and fall outside of the gender binary (male/female).
Hispanic	Used to describe a person of a Spanish-speaking lineage.
Latinx, Latino/Latina, or Latin	Used to describe a person of Latin American descent, and Latinx (pronounced "Latin Ex") is the gender inclusive way of doing so.
LGBTQIAAP+	"Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Aromantic, Pansexual." This term (often used in a shorter form as LGBTQ) is used to encompass all identities in the Queer Community and relates to both sexuality and gender. The plus sign is indicative that the phrase is inclusive of other sexual identifiers, however, attempting to represent an entire community in one acronym is difficult.
Black, Indigenous, and people of color BIPOC	An umbrella term used to describe anyone who is not considered white. This can include people who identify as Black, Indigenous/Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Latinx among others. BIPOC was created to replace the term POC (People of Color) to center the unique experiences of Black and Indigenous groups in the United States.
Person with a disability	A person with a physical, mental, learning, or other type of disability. It is important to use People First Language, putting the person before the disability (i.e. "a person who uses a wheelchair" instead of "wheelchair-bound person").
Transgender	Those whose gender identities differ from the sex they were assigned at birth.

We are always continuing to learn and grow in this space. If you have an additional idea for a term that is not on this list, please share with us at info@holisticindex.com.

IDENTITY TOOLKIT

The mission of Holistic is to elevate both people and companies so employees can bring their whole selves to work. A simple way to foster an equitable environment is to be cognizant of the way we talk about identity. The definitions of these terms have changed and evolved over time, and continue to do so today.

While we understand that identity is multifaceted and intersectional, below are some terms to help better understand the intricacies of identity.

When it comes to...	Know that...
Ethnicity	Refers to a person's cultural identity, which can include shared language, religion, customs, or nationality. While race and ethnicity have overlap, race is used to define broad categories based on shared physical characteristics and ancestral origin.
Race	People will identify themselves if and when they're ready. Use whichever terminology they provide you with and, if you don't know what it means, just ask!
Gender	Some individuals won't identify with the male/female binary, and may use terms like gender nonbinary, gender nonconforming, or countless others to describe themselves. Respect whichever pronouns (i.e. he/him/his, she/her/hers, they/them/theirs) someone tells you to use in reference to them.
Sexuality	Stereotypes have no place in the modern workforce and assumptions should be avoided. This is personal information that some may never choose to share with their coworkers, and that is alright.
National Origin	Someone's country of origin, whether they are a first generation immigrant (they themselves are an immigrant), second generation (their parents were immigrants), or beyond, is personal. No one is obligated to talk about this, but if they choose to, listen and keep an open mind.
Veteran Status	Veterans have a unique set of prior experiences. Avoid asking too many personal questions and let people disclose this information when and if they are comfortable.

IDENTITY TOOLKIT

When it comes to...	Know that...
Age	Grouping people by generational cohorts (i.e. millennial, baby boomer, etc.) often reinforces negative stereotypes. Try referring to groups with adjectives like young, elderly, experienced, etc.
Religion	Everyone views religion differently and holds a unique, personal set of beliefs. Respect those differences and the boundaries that may come with them-- some people may not want to share their religious beliefs or lack of religious beliefs with their coworkers.
Ability/Disability Status	Ableism is an often ignored (but very present) form of discrimination. Be sure to use people first language (i.e. "a person in a wheelchair" instead of "wheelchair bound") when referring to a specific disability.
Socioeconomic Status	Your coworkers (even those in the same role) may have varying degrees of financial stability or access to opportunity. Be aware of this, but accept that you may never know your coworkers' socioeconomic status.
Marital Status	<p>Some people have partners who are the opposite sex, some people have partners who are the same sex, some people have partners who identify as nonbinary, and some people choose not to have a partner at all.</p> <p>Never assume someone is married or in a relationship unless they directly disclose this information to you. When they do, do not assume the gender of their partner and use gender neutral pronouns (they/them/theirs) unless otherwise directed. If you are aware of their marital status but unsure of their sex, stick to terms like "spouse" or "significant other".</p>

OUTDATED LANGUAGE

The mission of Holistic is to elevate both people and companies so employees can bring their whole selves to work. In addition to being knowledgeable about what language to use in discussions of identity, it is also important to know what language to avoid.

Here are some outdated terms to be mindful of during your discussions around diversity, equity, and inclusion:

Term	Meaning
Illegal	Human beings cannot be 'illegal,' and this terminology implies wrongdoing when it is often not the case. There are a multitude of circumstances that can prohibit individuals from gaining citizenship. Try using 'undocumented' instead, which also helps to decriminalize immigration.
Handicapped	This terminology defines a person by their ability, rather than using People First language. The American Disability Act (ADA) has enacted the use of the word 'disability' instead of 'handicap.' In addition to having a historically negative connotation, people with disabilities have advocated for the elimination of this word.
Minority	Not only does this word not accurately capture changing demographic trends, but it also indicates that people are less than or of lesser status than the 'majority.'
Underrepresented minority (URM)	See above. Instead, use 'underrepresented group' or the specific group in question when applicable, such as saying 'women in STEM are underrepresented'.
Non-white	This term is centered around whiteness. It assumes that white is the norm, and that everyone else is categorized as outside of that. It's better to describe others using the array of identity descriptors.
People of Color	This phrase contributes to the erasure of black experiences and anti-blackness in all racial communities. This approach erases the specific needs of the most vulnerable communities, and doesn't acknowledge the varying levels of injustice. Instead use BIPOC, meaning 'Black, Indigenous, People of Color.'
Tolerance	This word suggests acceptance to different cultures and practices, but does not mean agreement with the differences. This idea is commonly expressed with "I don't mind ___, as long as I don't see it."
Mentally-ill	This term overgeneralizes an entire grouping of individuals living with psychiatric conditions without being specific enough to reflect their lived experiences. Additionally, the use of the word illness implies that, like most physical conditions, there might be a solution one can work towards to be "better." Understanding and using person-first language is one way to begin to eliminate these types of generalizations from your vocabulary.

We are always continuing to learn and grow in this space. If you have an additional idea for a term that is not on this list, please share with us at info@holisticindex.com.

PEOPLE FIRST LANGUAGE

Here at Holistic, our mission is to elevate both people and companies so employees can bring their whole selves to work. A simple way to foster an equitable environment is to be cognizant of the language we use.

Language and attitudes are a two way street -- they each shape one another.

Putting the person before the disability helps to eliminate devaluation and prejudice towards people who are disabled. **People First language** encourages everyone to acknowledge others in a respectful way, instead of defining an individual by one characteristic they may have. Begin with people first language but if someone corrects you and expresses that it would be preferred to refer to them in another manner, you should adjust accordingly.

This section is meant to provide language to those that may be unfamiliar, and you should always consult with the individuals living with disabilities first to see what they would prefer.

“Person affected by”

“Individual with”

“Person who has”

Say
Person with disabilities
Person who uses a wheelchair
Person with a service dog
Person with a physical disability
Person who is blind or visually impaired
Person who is deaf
Person who uses a communication device
Person who has had a stroke or brain injury
Person with epilepsy or seizure disorder
Person with multiple sclerosis
Person with a congenital disability
Person with cerebral palsy
Person of short stature, little person
Person with autism
Person with an intellectual or cognitive disability
Person with a mental health condition
Person affected by substance use disorder
Person with diabetes

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MICROAGGRESSIONS

Here at Holistic, our mission is to elevate both people and companies so employees can bring their whole selves to work. One of the ways we can create a more inclusive work environment is by confronting microaggressions.

Microaggressions are brief comments that might appear harmless, but transmit negative messages to the recipient. These comments may reinforce stereotypes, express discomfort toward a group and their culture, or deny the discrimination that these groups face. Microaggressions have the effect of making the targeted person or implicated group feel inadequate, undervalued, and excluded. There are different types and levels of microaggressions.

Type and Definition	Examples
Microassaults: An individual intentionally behaves in a harmful manner	<i>Stereotyping</i> "You're Asian, so you must be really good at math."
	<i>Excluding</i> Speaking over women in meetings
Microinsults: An individual unintentionally behaves in a harmful manner	<i>Exoticizing/Objectifying</i> "Can I touch your hair?"
	<i>Belittling</i> "You're so articulate!"
	<i>Othering</i> "You must be really grateful to be in this country!"
Microinvalidations: An individual's words invalidate a person's lived experiences	<i>Universalizing</i> "I don't see color" or "All lives matter!"
	<i>Misrecognizing</i> "You don't look half-Black!", "But what's your real name?", or "You were born here!?"

- 1 An example of a **verbal** microaggression would be assuming education levels, cultural interests, or class status because of race.
- 2 An example of a **behavioral** microaggression would be stiffening up or clutching your bag when a Black or brown person is in proximity.
- 3 An example of an **environmental** microaggression would be naming companies or mascots racially insensitive names.

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions reveal and perform commonly held ideas, stereotypes, and assumptions that form in society around particular races. We call this process *racialization*.

Here are just some of the different ways in which microaggressions become racialized.

Racial Group	Themes of Microaggressions Toward Group
Native American	Assumption that they are vanished or “not around”
	Ascription of being “pre-modern”
	Accusation of racial inauthenticity (high burden of proof to prove native citizenship)
Asian	Assumption of permanent foreignness
	Ascription of intelligence and “model minority” myth
Black or African American	Assumption of intellectual inferiority
	Assumption of criminality
	Assumption of socioeconomic status
	Conversations about / assumptions of prowess in athletics
Latinx	Assumption of intellectual inferiority
	Assumption of socioeconomic status
	Assumption of lack of citizenship
	Assumption of criminality
Biracial / Mixed Race	Accusations of racial inauthenticity
	Having to choose between identities
	Viewed as straying from a “racial ideal”

Commonalities across microaggressions targeted towards any racial group:

- Pathologizing of cultural values and communication styles
- Universalizing of ethnic experience and erasure of interracial difference
- Exoticizing of the particular group in question
- Assumptions about political and social leanings

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