

Guidelines on using language and images

Language reflects attitudes and also helps to define them. As clinical practitioners you have a responsibility to use words, phrases and images that do not reinforce offensive or discriminatory attitudes and to avoid terms that may cause offence. Use of language is of course a personal choice and definitions and meaning of words changes over time but with a little thought, you can ensure that you send out positive messages.

Loaded words

The connotations and significance of words changes over time. Some words that were once widely used are no longer acceptable. Below is some general guidance on terminology:

- Use gay and lesbian, or bisexual rather than homosexual
- Use Black, Asian, black and minority ethnic (own preference) rather coloured
- Use woman (so as not to sound dismissive or patronising) rather than girl/lady
- Use disabled people rather than handicapped or people with disabilities

Also avoid using male dominated language which can imply women are of less importance than men.

Images

Attitudes, values and beliefs are also portrayed in images. Studies in perception indicate that the impact of images is greater than that of words.

- *Representation* – it is important to include women as well as men, black and minority ethnic people as well as white people and disabled people as well as non disabled people and people of all sexualities and age.
- *Role* – people of all types should be portrayed in positions of power, authority and status, not just white older males.