



# **LET'S GET THIS RIGHT**

***Inclusivity, Diversity and Equality:  
A Guide to Useful Terminology***

**BRITISH**  
SKYDIVING

# CHANGING TERMINOLOGIES

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## **SECTION 1: Summary**

Wouldn't it be great if it were easy for everyone to talk about differences without feeling intimidated by the possibility of getting it wrong? Isn't that key to embracing diversity and providing a welcoming environment for all in our sport? If your answer to these questions is "yes" then you are probably already making a significant contribution to British Skydiving's vision of an inclusive sport, a community in which all are respected, supported, involved, valued and empowered, and are treated fairly and appropriately.

British Skydiving's Inclusivity, Diversity and Equality Working Group has compiled this guide to help those involved with training, instructing, developing resources, providing social media content and working with customers, as well as anyone else within the association who is concerned with trying to 'get it right.'

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## SECTION 2: Introduction

The majority of people try to avoid falling into preconceived, negative responses towards others based on characteristics such as religion, ethnicity or age. However, in reality, we all operate according to an 'affinity bias;' a tendency to connect with people who look and seem most like ourselves. We generally find it much easier to surround ourselves with those who share our interests and have similar characteristics, such as gender, age or sexual orientation. In other words, an 'affinity group.' This brings a level of familiarity and comfort, which puts us at ease. Unfortunately, this also brings a tendency to respond more positively to people who fit within those groups than we do to people outside our particular groups; an 'in-group bias.'

While we might set our sights on being open and inclusive, most of us simply don't talk about race, religion, disability or sexual orientation, and if we do it's within the comfort of our affinity groups. This means we can find ourselves uncertain of the right way to talk to someone or to refer to someone who is not part of our in-group. Trying to make sure we use the right words or pronounce unfamiliar names properly can be paralysing. It's hard work. But that's not helpful when our customers, colleagues and jump buddies are becoming increasingly diverse and we want to be inclusive and dismantle the barriers that might prevent them continuing and progressing within the sport, or just having a great time doing their one and only tandem.

With the best will in the world, it can be hard to keep track of changes in aspects such as terminology. Even the most progressive among us can get it wrong, and even if we do manage to use the right word or phrase, that isn't the whole picture. Also, there often isn't one universally-agreed, self-evident, correct term; language is largely dependent on context, and a term preferred by one person may not be acceptable to another. Recognising all this can lead to nervousness around those outside our affinity groups, which in turn often generates subtle, unconscious behaviours that actually promote divisions, such as not speaking directly to an individual, not making eye contact with them or laughing when pronouncing their name.

**So, if you are worried about what to say, how to refer to someone or about getting the terminology wrong, it can be helpful to remember:**

- ↘ the other person is just that, another person, and unlikely to be offended if you are polite and respectful.
- ↘ those who might be offended by a genuine question are few and far between, and most people will be more than happy if you ask them how they would like to be referred to, or how to pronounce their name.
- ↘ owning and learning from your mistakes, and a sincere apology if you get something wrong, goes a long way to making people feel welcome.
- ↘ language continually evolves, so keep listening and learning. For example, occasionally check resources that can be relied on to have the most up-to-date information (see Section 4 of this document).

With all this in mind, British Skydiving's Inclusivity, Diversity and Equality Working Group has drawn from the resources listed in Section 4 to put together some information around the most relevant terms at the time of writing.



## **SECTION 3: Which Terms Should I Use?**

### **3.1. Some terms to avoid, and a few alternatives**

#### **ABLE-BODIED**

While it can be an accurate definition, this term is generally used inaccurately. Describing someone as able-bodied suggests they do not have any physical impairment, and it implies some are not able, or are less capable than others, but in the real world some bodies are more able than others, and ability is often far more complex than this one-dimensional view allows. For example, in many ways a World Champion in FS is more able than someone working on their FS1, but they may have an impairment which is not obvious in relation to that particular task. The preferred term is generally non-disabled.

#### **ACCESSIBILITY**

Using terms such as disability friendly or disabled access highlights difficulty or inability, and describing facilities in terms such as disabled toilets or disabled parking is just plain wrong – toilets and parking bays are not disabled! More appropriate phrasing and signage includes accessible toilets or accessible parking and parking for blue or orange badge holders.

#### **BAME**

An acronym for Black and Asian & Minority Ethnic. BAME has become more frequently used than BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) as it recognises the significant and distinct Asian population in the UK. However, it is also recognised that either of these acronyms is an overly simplistic reduction of the complex experiences of an individual. For example, the 'Asian' category generally encompasses the South Asian ethnicities, Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani, alongside East Asian ethnicities, such as Chinese. If used, BAME should not be pronounced as a word, but as 'B-A-M-E' and, as this does not describe an individual identity, avoid saying "she's a BAME skydiver." Rather, try to be specific by using phrases such as "she's a Black skydiver" or "she's a Pakistani skydiver."

#### **DISABLED PERSON OR PERSON WITH A DISABILITY**

While neither of these terms is essentially wrong, there are split views over the appropriateness of each and it is a personal choice which someone uses to identify themselves. With this in mind, it can be best to ask people what their preferred term is. However, avoid questions such as "what's wrong with you?" which, in implying that there is something wrong with the individual, is very negative, and can also allude to punishment or illness. Some people argue that they do not own a disability but are instead 'disabled' by the fact that the world around them is not built with accessibility in mind. Some also find the term differently-abled patronising and inaccurate. It is generally better to use a phrase such as "my teammate has a protected characteristic." It is also more appropriate to describe someone as walking with or using a mobility aid, or as a wheelchair user, than to describe them as having mobility problems, as it may not be a problem to the individual.



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## **OLDER**

Generally less offensive than the adjective old; after all, everyone is older than someone. Mature can also be an acceptable alternative, as it implies advanced emotional development. Seasoned is another acceptable alternative, indicating lived experience and complexity accrued over time.

## **RACE**

A categorisation that is based mainly on physical attributes or traits, assigning people to a specific race simply by having similar appearances or skin colour. It has been increasingly acknowledged that racial categorisation schemes were invented by scientists to support worldviews that positioned some groups of people as superior and others as inferior, rather than an actual biological fact. We see this at play in the way race designations have changed over time. For example, in the United States today, Irish, Italian and Jewish people are considered White, but they were previously categorised as non-White. The term Ethnicity has a broader application than race and has usually been used to refer to long shared cultural experiences, religious practices, traditions, ancestry, language, dialect or national origins (for example, African-Caribbean, Indian). Consequently, ethnicity can be seen as a more positive way of framing identity and is more commonly used and asked about within diversity questionnaires in the UK.

## **YOUNG**

Using this term to address anyone who is not actually an adolescent (or other versions such as girl / boy) can be condescending and infantilising. It subtly continues the 'younger is better' mindset, thereby implicitly perpetuating ageism through negative positioning of older people. Particular care should be taken using the term girl(s) when males are being addressed as man / men in the same context as this subtly reinforces power imbalances, even while appearing on the surface as a compliment.

## **3.2. What's generally good to use, and useful to know**

### **ABLEISM**

This term is used to refer to dominant attitudes in society that assume there is an ideal body and mind, leading to discriminatory behaviours toward people who differ from this norm.

### **ALLY**

Generally refers to a person who actively supports members of a social group other than their own affinity group, which might involve acknowledging disadvantage and oppression, becoming informed and/or taking action.

### **BISEXUAL OR BI**

Used to indicate an attraction towards more than one gender. Bi people may also describe themselves using terms such as pansexual, bi-curious, queer.

### **BI-CULTURAL**

A bi-cultural identity involves a combination of two cultures.

### **CISGENDER OR CIS**

Refers to a person whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.

### **ETHNIC MINORITY, MINORITY ETHNIC OR MINORITISED ETHNIC**

These terms generally refer to racial and ethnic groups that are in a minority in the population. So, in the UK, these terms usually cover all ethnic groups except the majority ethnicity, White British. This means they include White minority ethnic groups such as Polish, Roma and Irish Traveller. Minority ethnic is sometimes preferred over ethnic minority as it counters the tendency to use the term 'ethnic' when referring to people who are not White British; by not putting 'ethnic' first, 'minority ethnic' better recognises the fact that everyone has an ethnicity, including White British people. Minoritised ethnic, and the similar term racially minoritised, are more recent additions that acknowledge the way in which individuals have been minoritised through social processes of power and domination rather than just existing in distinct statistical minorities. It also better reflects the fact that ethnic groups that are minorities in the UK can be majorities in the global population.



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## **GENDER**

Although a sense of gender can align with the sex assigned at birth, it goes well beyond chromosomes and genitalia. The notion of a male/female gender division is widely seen as a social and cultural construct rather than a biological given, and the various stereotypes that come with that are well-known. There are those who describe themselves using terms such as transgender (their gender is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth, often shortened to trans), genderqueer (they identify with neither, both, or a combination of male and female genders), gender-fluid and non-binary (they do not align with this male/female binary). Terms such as gender-variant, crossdresser, genderless, agender, nongender, third gender, trans man or trans woman are also used.

## **GENDER-NEUTRAL PRONOUNS**

Words used to refer to people in conversation that are not associated with a particular grammatical or social gender and do not imply male or female. The English pronoun they is gender-neutral, and can be used in the singular as well as plural. Various other gender-neutral pronouns have been suggested for the English language, for example 'zhe, zher, zhim' and 'ey, em, eir.' While some individuals prefer to use these pronouns, they are not in regular use so there is currently limited understanding of them.

## **INTERSECTIONALITY**

Refers to the interactive effects of various forms of discrimination and disempowerment. It hinges on the recognition that a person can have multiple identities and can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. For example, a Black woman in the UK does not experience gender inequalities in exactly the same way as a White woman, nor racial oppression identical to that experienced by a Black man; each intersection of race, gender, age etc. produces a qualitatively distinct experience.

## **INTERSEX**

This term is used to describe a person whose biological attributes (e.g., chromosomes, reproductive organs or genitalia) vary in some way from traditional societal assumptions about what it means to be male or female. This may be apparent at birth but often not until puberty, or in the case of some women, when they conceive or try to conceive.

## **LGBTQI / LGBTQ+**

The acronyms for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (or queer), intersex + other gender variants. These are currently seen as the most all-encompassing acronyms for the gay community, including those with non-cis gender identities. The acronym LGBTQIA is a useful recent addition that refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex and asexual (or allied).

## **MULTIRACIAL, MIXED HERITAGE, DUAL HERITAGE, MIXED-RACE, MIXED-ETHNICITY**

All describe a person who has parentage or ancestors from more than one ethnic and/or racial group. Some people can get confused between interracial and biracial. An individual can be described as biracial if their heritage is mixed; interracial, on the other hand, is used to describe relationships or interactions between individuals from different racial groups.

## **PEOPLE OF COLOUR**

This is often the preferred collective term for referring to non-White racial groups. Racial justice advocates have been using the term 'people of colour' since the late 1970s as an inclusive and unifying



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frame across different racial groups that are not White. While this can be a politically useful term, and describes people according to their own attributes (as opposed to what they are not, e.g., non-White), it is important whenever possible to identify people through their own racial/ethnic group, as each has its own distinct experience and meaning. 'People of colour' should not be confused with the highly contentious term coloured people.

### **PROTECTED CHARACTERISTICS**

The Equality Act 2010 identifies nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity. The Act makes it unlawful for an organisation to discriminate against someone, victimise them or harass them, directly or indirectly, because of these protected characteristics in various areas of life, including employment, education and the provision of services.

### **QUEER**

A term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBT community (racism, sizeism, ableism etc.). Although some LGBT people view the word as a slur, sections of the queer community have reclaimed it.

### **TRANSITIONING**

Refers to the steps a trans person takes to live in the gender with which they identify, which could involve medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to take that path.

### **WHITE FRAGILITY**

A state that affects some White people in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves that include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear and guilt, and behaviours such as argumentation, silence and leaving the stress-inducing situation.

### **WHITE PRIVILEGE**

This term refers to the unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on people solely because they are White. The accumulated and interrelated advantages and disadvantages of White privilege are reflected in racial/ethnic inequities in areas such as life-expectancy and other health outcomes, income and wealth, and different access to opportunities and resources. These privileges exist at the structural, institutional, cultural, interpersonal and individual levels, and generally White people who experience such privileges do so without being conscious of it.

### **ZERO SUM GAME**

This phrase refers to the idea that if one person gains something, another person loses something. This is often seen when an organisation works to make underrepresented groups feel more included, and dominant groups in the organisation believe that they lose, or are at risk of losing, power, influence and clout to these underrepresented groups.

## **SECTION 4: Useful Links**

In setting out the terms and descriptions in this guide, the Working Group has made use of the following resources, which we highly recommend to anyone who is keen to investigate further and/or keep up with the changing landscape of the 'right' terminology:

- <https://www.brap.org.uk/post/race-fluency>
- <https://celebratingdisability.co.uk/how-to-talk-about-disability/>
- <https://digital.nhs.uk/about-nhs-digital/corporate-information-and-documents/nhs-digital-style-guidelines/how-we-talk/writing-about-disability-words-to-use-and-avoid>
- <https://www.hivelearning.com/site/diversity-inclusion-glossary/>
- <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/topics/ethnic-minority-lawyers/a-guide-to-race-and-ethnicity-terminology-and-language>
- <https://www.racialequitytools.org/glossary>
- <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms>
- <https://style.ons.gov.uk/category/house-style/language-and-spelling/>

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