

Rebus Theatre & Workplace Training

# Stages of Empathy

## INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION HANDBOOK

A free theatre-based training program to make community activities more accessible for people with disabilities across NSW, VIC and the ACT

*Inclusion  
Benefits  
Everyone!*



'Stages of Empathy' is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services



Australian Government

Supported by



ACT  
Government





# Stages of Empathy

## INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION HANDBOOK

*"I don't remember what I had for dinner last night, but I remember every minute of that training session"*

### **Stages of Empathy: A Free Training Program for Inclusive Community Activities**

Thanks for being part of Stages of Empathy! We'd love for you to jump into this information pack we put together for you to discover even more ways to make your organisation more welcoming for autistic people, people with intellectual disability, psychosocial disability, and those who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community. This handbook is your backstage pass to understanding these communities a little better, with tips and insights to help you create spaces where everyone feels they truly belong. Let's make inclusion something we all take centre stage on!

### **About Rebus Theatre**

Rebus Theatre delivers workplace training and performances with the intent to drive social change. Theatre is uniquely powerful. It can bring about change, in an individual, a community, or a whole society. Theatre engages the body and the emotions, as well as the mind. It makes deeper and more lasting change possible. The stage is a place where we can imagine any reality, any future. It's where we can be the change we want to see in the world.

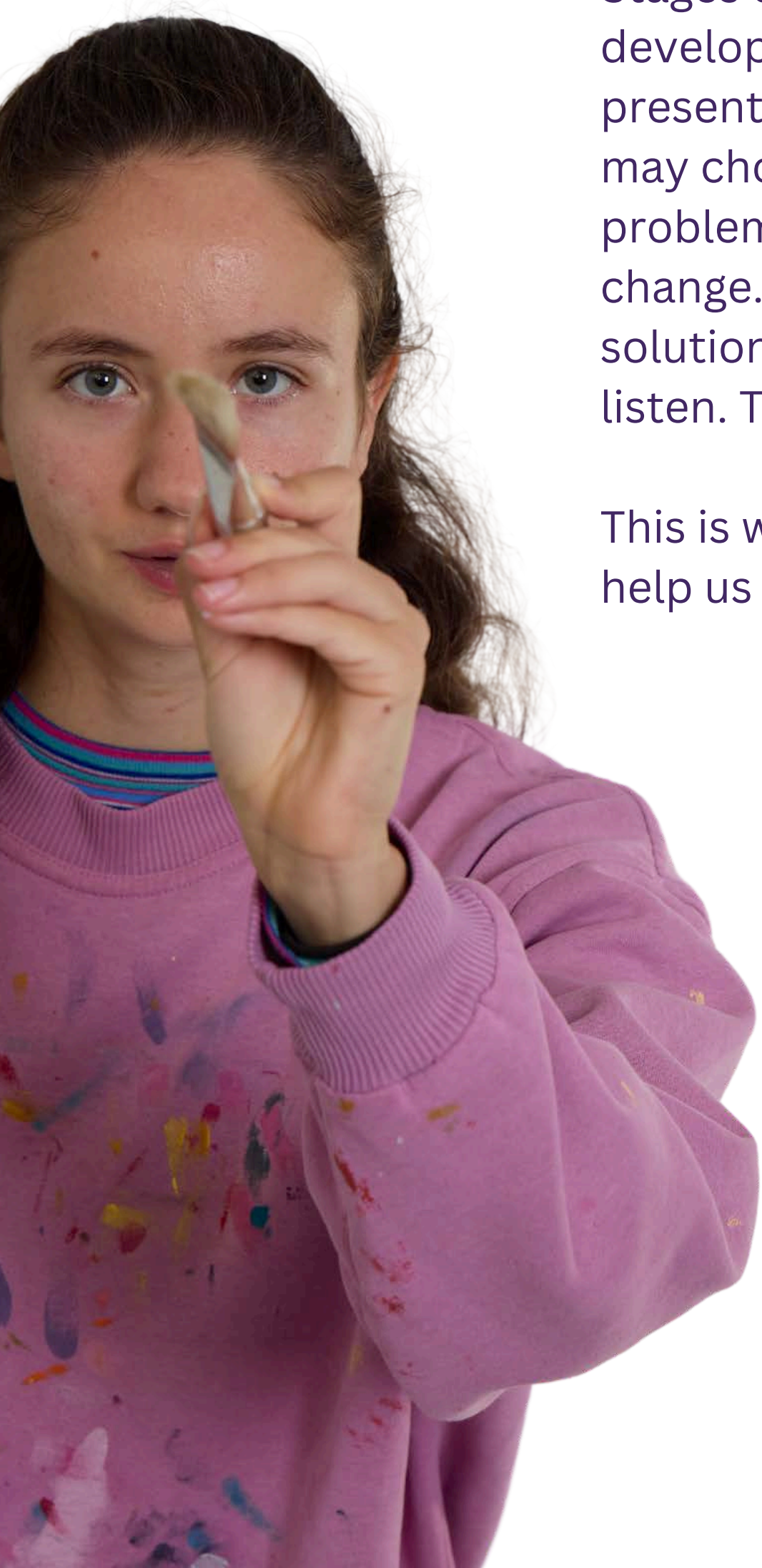
### **About Forum Theatre**

Much of our work at Rebus involves an approach called Forum Theatre. Stages of Empathy uses the Forum Theatre model. This is a form developed in Brazil and Peru by Augusto Boal. In Forum Theatre, actors present a problem based on lived experience. Members of the audience may choose to step onto the stage to play characters trying to solve the problem. They engage their bodies, minds and emotions in rehearsing change. They take part in a theatrical dialogue searching for ideal solutions. Those who choose not to participate on stage watch and listen. They may engage in discussion and dialogue.

This is where you come in, our fearless audience, offering new ideas to help us work towards a truly inclusive world.

**The cast creatives and staff of *Stages of Empathy* also belong to one or more of the groups represented in the performance.**

**This document includes information on a range of different disabilities and identities represented in the performance: autism, psychosocial disability, intellectual disability and LGBTQIA+ identity. Stage of Empathy aims to overcome attitudinal barriers to mainstream services as being accessible to people with disability.**





# Stages of Empathy

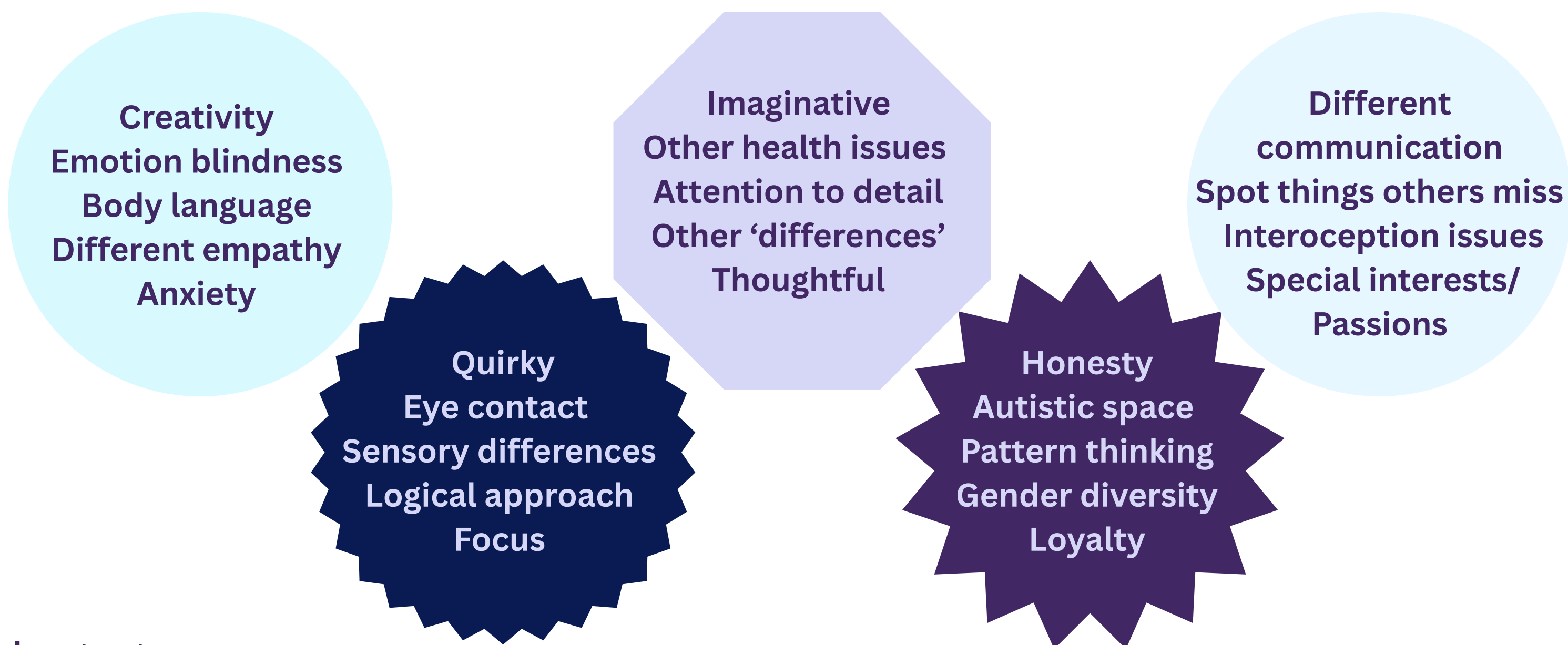
## INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION HANDBOOK

### Autism

Autism is essentially a neurological difference. It often relates to differences in communication and social interactions. Autism is not acquired, and each autistic individual is different.

#### Characteristics

Autistic people often have a range of attributes related to their autism. This is a list of some common autistic characteristics. It should be noted that not all autistic people have all these attributes. Autism is different for each autistic individual. It is not one size fits all.



#### Language

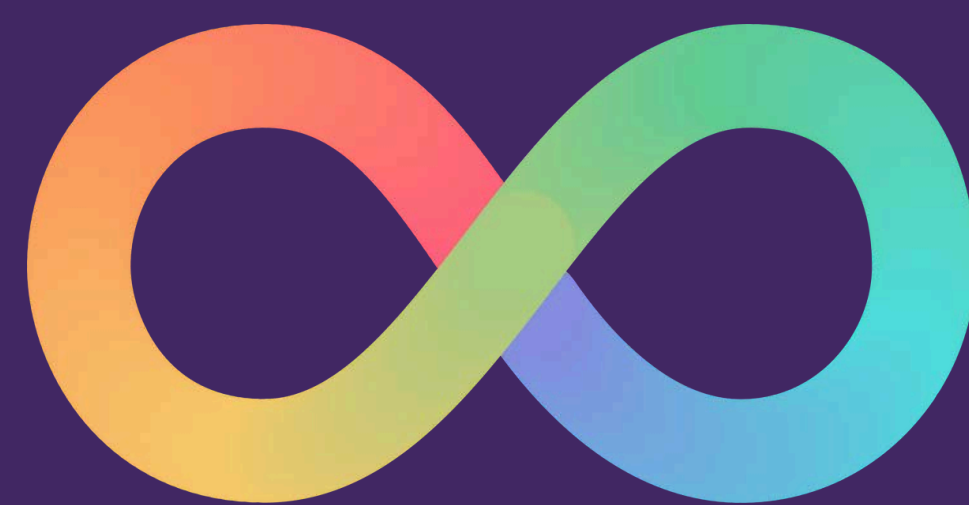
The language that we use around autism is very important and it demonstrates how we feel about autistic people.

#### Identity first versus person first language

Many autistic people use what is known as identity first language - 'I am autistic'. This often denotes that they feel autism to be an integral part of who they are. Others use 'person first' language - 'I am a person with autism'.

#### Some inappropriate language around autism includes:

- 'Autism spectrum disorder' or ASD. Many autistic people do not view their autism as a disorder but as a difference.
- 'Aspergers/ Aspie' Asperger syndrome is no longer in the diagnostic literature and is problematic for several reasons.
- 'Suffers from autism' is also not appropriate.
- 'High functioning / low functioning / mild autism / profoundly autistic' These terms are based on assessments of functioning which are unhelpful to autistic people and considered offensive.



*This is the neurodiversity pride symbol*

#### How to support autistic people

- Listen, don't assume
- Educate yourself about autism – view content by autistic creators
- Aim to be an active ally
- Be aware of sensory issues and make necessary changes
- Understand that autistic experience is different not less
- Embrace the concept of 'nothing about us without us'



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### Intellectual Disability

Intellectual disability refers to conditions which impact on people in the areas of learning, problem solving and judgement and activities of daily life (such as communication skills and social participation).

People with intellectual disability are all individuals and have their own set of circumstances.

#### Language

- Unlike the autistic community, and much of the disabled community, who largely prefer identity first language, this is generally not the case when it comes to people with intellectual disability.
- Use 'intellectual disability'. Refer to individuals, persons, or people with intellectual disabilities.
- Never use the terms "retardation," "retarded," "retard," etc. These R-words are hurtful slurs about people with intellectual disabilities and are highly offensive.
- Distinguish between adults and children with intellectual disability.
- Do not sensationalise the accomplishments of people with intellectual disability.



#### Damaging Assumptions

*Infantilisation* – assumptions around seeing adults with intellectual disability as being eternal children.

*Incompetence and dependence* - assumptions based on views of incompetence or people being dependent and unable to make decisions for themselves.

*Assumptions around sexuality* – Assumptions around all adults with intellectual disability as being asexual – or assuming that their sexual expression is 'wrong' and should be discouraged. Adults with intellectual disability have the same right to sexual expression and sexual safety as anyone else.

#### Choice and control

Choice and control is an issue for many people with intellectual disability. People may have carers and family members making all or most of their decisions for them regardless of their wishes or capability to make a choice. It is important to ensure that individuals have the option of contributing to and driving decision-making, particularly for things which affect them.

#### How to support people with intellectual disabilities

- Be non-judgemental, show empathy, and offer reassurance.
- Acknowledge their feelings, perspectives and experience.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Use clear and specific communication.
- Treat them as you would your other peers – adults are adults and should be treated as such.



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### Psychosocial Disability

Psychosocial disability is also known as mental health challenges, or mental health conditions. 'Mental health' relates to our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Psychosocial Disability refers to a wide range of mental health conditions including:

- Depression
- Anxiety disorders
- Eating disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Bipolar disorder
- Substance abuse disorders

#### Language

**Appropriate language around psychosocial disability includes:**

- Experiences mental health challenges
- Has a psychosocial disability
- Has a mental health condition
- A person who has been diagnosed with schizophrenia
- Client / participant / person with a lived experience

#### Inappropriate language includes:

- Slurs such as mental, mad, crazy, weird, psycho, schizo
- 'Suffers from a mental illness'
- Incorrect use of 'psychotic' to mean violent or dangerous
- 'Patient' - 'Patient' relates to illness and hospitals. Most people with psychosocial disability live independently in the community, not in hospital.

#### How to support people with a psychosocial disability

- Be non-judgemental, show empathy, and offer reassurance
- Acknowledge that you can see things are hard for them
- Let them know you're there for them. Mental health challenges can make people feel isolated and alone
- Ask them to be honest about how you can support them
- Ensure confidentiality, it's important they know they can trust you
- Provide encouragement when you notice progress

#### Unhelpful statements

- I know how you feel
- Just snap out of it
- You're attention seeking
- Think more positively
- You'll be right
- Just get over it





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### LGBTQIA+ Inclusion

LGBTQIA+ refers to a person's sexuality, gender identity and expression and/or being intersex.

**Sexuality** refers to a person's sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions and behaviours.

**Gender** refers to how a person feels about, experiences and expresses their gender. There are many different gender identities. Gender identity is different from biological sex assigned at birth.

**Intersex** refers to people that were born with atypical sex characteristics, such as some male and some female sex characteristics.

#### Language

##### Appropriate language:

- **Trans/Transgender** - a person whose gender differs from that which they were assigned at birth, e.g. 'he is a trans man'
- **Non-binary** - a person who does not identify as being male or female
- **Gay** - typically a man who is sexually attracted to men, e.g. 'he is a gay man'
- **Lesbian** - a woman who is attracted to women, e.g. 'she has a female partner and identifies as Lesbian')
- **Bi / bi+ / bisexual** - a person who is sexually attracted to both men and women
- **Asexual** - a person who has no interest or low interest in sexual activities
- **Intersex** - this is the correct term for a person born with atypical sex characteristics.
- **Queer** - this is a term which encompasses people from all the identities in the LGBTQIA+ cohort. There is some sensitivity around using Queer as in the past was a hateful slur but has now been reclaimed by some LGBTQIA+ people. It is important to be aware of the differences in opinion within the LGBTQIA+ community around the use of 'Queer.'
- **Questioning** – an additional meaning of the 'Q' in the LGBTQIA+ acronym is used to describe people who are questioning their gender identity and/or sexuality. This is common, particularly among younger people.

##### Inappropriate language

There are some terms which are offensive and hurtful for LGBTQIA+ folks. These include:

- **Trannie / transvestite** – instead use 'transgender' or 'trans'
- **Lifestyle choice** – Queer/LGBTQIA+ identity and experience is not a choice. It is a core part of who a person is
- The term '**hermaphrodite**' is not appropriate and is offensive to Intersex people
- **Sexual preference** – this also suggests that sexuality is a choice so is inappropriate
- Never ask questions about a person's physical sex characteristics.



*Rebus Accessibility Manager and proud Non-binary and Asexual person Yenn Purkis*



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## INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY INFORMATION HANDBOOK

### LGBTQIA+ Inclusion Continued

LGBTQIA+ refers to a person's sexuality, gender identity and expression and/or being intersex.

#### How to support LGBTQIA+ people

##### Pronoun usage

Many trans and gender divergent people use they/them, xe/xeir, she/they, he/they or other pronouns. Misgendering means using the person's incorrect pronouns.

Although it can be easy to accidentally misgender a person, it is important to use a person's correct pronouns.

If you get it wrong, simply apologise and resolve to try not to do it again.

Some organisations show their support for the LGBTQIA+ community by including pronouns in email footers, biographies etc

##### Some ways to be inclusive and respectful

- Park any prejudice or bigotry – prejudice and bigotry are wrong, not LGBTQIA+ people!
- Don't assume someone's gender just by looking at them
- Use respectful language
- Don't 'out' people
- If someone comes out to you then normalise this and reassure the person you support them

#### LGBTQIA+ Identity Flags

Beyond the rainbow flag that represents the whole community, there are also pride flags that represent specific identities within the LGBTQIA+ community – like the lesbian flag, bisexual flags, or transgender flag.

If you're not sure about what these identities mean, you can [learn more here](#). These flags can be used when talking to or about these specific identities, with some listed below:



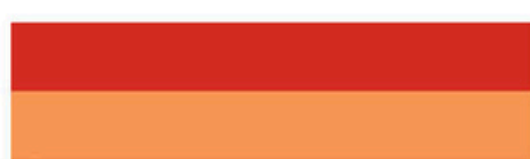
Original Pride Flag



Philadelphia Flag  
or Rainbow POC Flag



Progress Pride Flag



Lesbian Flag



Gay Flag



Bisexual Flag



Pansexual Flag



Trans Flag



Non-Binary Flag



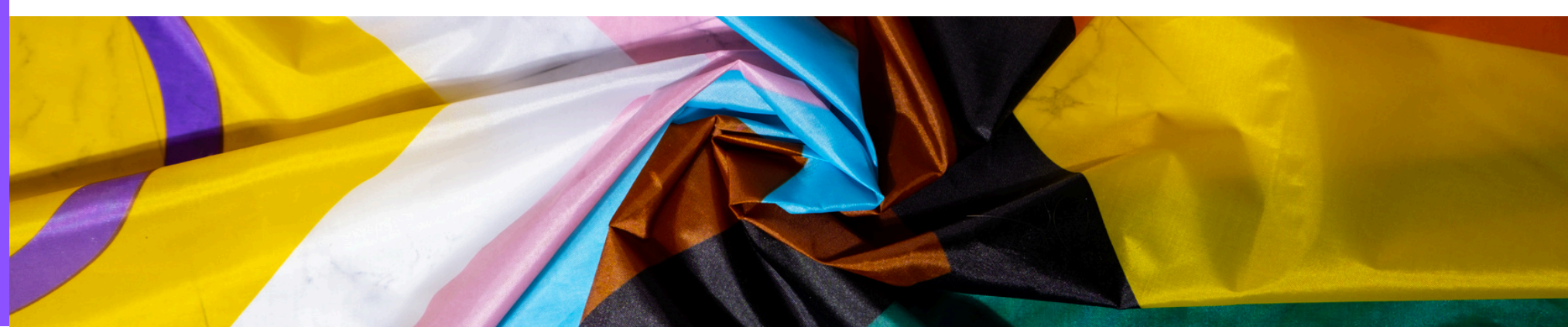
Intersex Flag



Asexual Flag



Aromantic Flag





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### Resources

#### Autism

Reframing Autism - <https://reframingautism.org.au/>

Autistic Self Advocacy Network - <https://www.asan-aunz.org/>

#### Intellectual disability

Council for Intellectual Disability - <https://cid.org.au/resources/>

Inclusion Australia - <https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/resources/>

#### Psychosocial Disability

BeyondBlue - <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Headspace - <https://headspace.org.au/>

#### LGBTQIA+ resources:

Meridian - <https://www.meridianact.org.au/>

Minus 18 - <https://www.minus18.org.au/>

IDAHOBIT - <https://www.idahobit.org.au/identity-and-stats/understanding-pride-flags>

### Help others 'Be the Change'

We would greatly appreciate you encouraging other community groups to join **Stages of Empathy** and take a proactive step toward creating a community where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued. Together, we can build spaces where people of all abilities can thrive.

Organisations can **register their interest here** or by emailing [harry@rebustheatre.com](mailto:harry@rebustheatre.com)

Spots are limited, so don't wait!  
Contact us now to secure your place in this impactful, no-cost training program.



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