

What to Know About Pronouns

How to Take Important Steps in Becoming a TGNCNB Ally!



What is a "Pronoun"?

Pronouns are the words that replace a person's name in a sentence. Pronouns are generally used to refer to people in sentences and conversation when they are not present.

Someone who supports those in the Transgender Gender Non-Conforming Non-Binary community.

Why focus on pronouns?

You may have noticed that people are sharing their pronouns in introductions, on name tags, and at meetings. This is happening to make spaces more inclusive of people who are part of the TGNCNB community. Including pronouns is a first step toward respecting people's **gender identity**, working against **cisnormativity**, as well as creating a more welcoming space for people of all gender identities.

The assumption that cisgender identity is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and institutional privileges that further the marginalization of TGNCNB people.

What are some examples of Pronouns?

Gender pronouns can look like and are not limited to:

- ◆ they/them/theirs (neutral pronouns)
- ◆ she/her/hers (feminine pronouns)
- ◆ he/him/his (masculine pronouns)
- ◆ ze/zir/zirs (neutral pronouns)
- ◆ ze/hir/hirs (neutral pronouns)

A personal conception of oneself as male, female, both, neither and/or another gender. Gender identity can be the same as or different from the gender a person is assigned at birth. Gender identity is a matter of self-identification; no one can tell anyone else how to identify or what terms to use. Gender identity is different from sexual orientation.

Here are examples of Pronouns in use.

◆ They, Them, Theirs:

This is a pretty common neutral pronoun. . . and yes, it can in fact be used in the singular, even though it is still followed by *are*. You can use this pronoun as a neutral identifier if you are unsure what pronoun someone uses.

"Morgan left their phone because they were in a hurry."

◆ She, Her, Hers:

If Dana's pronouns are she, her, and hers, you could say "Dana left her phone because she was in a hurry."

◆ Ze, Hir:

Ze is pronounced like "zee" can also be spelled zie or xe, and replaces she/he/they. Hir is pronounced like "here" and replaces her/hers/him/his/they/theirs.

"Terry left hir phone because ze was in a hurry."

◆ Just my name please!

Some people do not use pronouns at all, using their name as a pronoun instead.

"Angel left Angel's phone because Angel was in a hurry."

Why is it Important to Respect People's Pronouns?

It is not possible to know someone's pronoun simply by looking at them.

- ◆ Asking and correctly using someone's pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.
- ◆ When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun the term is called **misgendering**. Misgendering someone can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or **dysphoric** (or often, all of the above).
- ◆ While many people use the wrong pronoun by mistake, sometimes people use the wrong pronoun intentionally to hurt or disrespect people of the TGNCNB community. Repeatedly misgendering someone is an act of violence that can cause a great deal of distress and even impact safety.

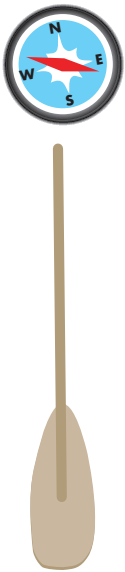
Very unhappy, uneasy, or dissatisfied.

*Note: This term is similar to **dysmorphia** for TGNCNB people. It is a more specific reference to the negative feelings caused by having a body (or being treated in a negative way because of one's appearance) that does not match one's identity.

It is important to use the correct pronouns when referring to someone because it honors their gender identity and is a sign of mutual respect between the involved parties. It is also important to use the correct pronouns for the safety of the person involved. Using incorrect pronouns can potentially put the person in an unsafe situation by "outing" them.

Refers to the experience of being labeled by others as a gender other than the one that person identifies.

How Do You Ask Someone About Their Pronouns Using OAR¹?



O
A
R

It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption. The OAR project was developed to disperse some of that awkwardness. These three letters stand for:

- Offer** your pronouns
- Ask** for their pronouns
- Respect** their pronouns

Asking people about their pronouns has become commonplace in LGBTQ+ and safe-space communities. Outside of those communities, asking someone about their pronoun use is greatly appreciated rather than making any assumptions about someone's pronouns. Other ways to be

gender inclusive can look like, but are not limited to:

The act or practice of revealing personal information about a person in regards to their queerness.

◆ **Offering your pronouns, then asking for theirs.** "Hi my name is Alex, and I use he/him, they/them pronouns.

- ◆ "What gender pronouns should I use to refer to you?"
- ◆ "What are your gender pronouns?"
- ◆ "I don't want to make any assumptions, so what gender pronouns do you use?"
- ◆ "How should I refer to you in conversations?"
- ◆ "Which pronouns do you use?"
- ◆ "Can you remind me which pronouns you use for yourself?"

- ◆ Including pronouns during introductions
- ◆ Including pronouns on name tags

The notion that all services, opportunities, and establishments are open to all people and that male and female stereotypes do not define societal roles and expectations.

How Do You Ask Someone About Their Pronouns in Activities or at Events?

If you are asking as part of an introduction exercise and you want to quickly explain what a pronoun is, you can say something like this:

- ♦ "Tell us your name, where you're from, and your pronouns. That means the pronouns you like me to use when referring to you. For example, "I'm Morgan from New York. I like to be referred to using they, them, and their pronouns. So you could say, 'they went to their car' if you were talking about me."

What Do I Do If I Call Someone By The Wrong Pronoun?

People make mistakes and it can be a bit difficult to adjust to using someone's correct pronouns. If you accidentally misgender someone (calling them by the wrong pronouns/gender) just say you're sorry and continue the conversation using the correct pronouns. This can look like:

- ♦ "Morgan is going on vacation. She - sorry, they said they are really excited for the time off."

In social situations, it is best to simply say "sorry" and continue the conversation using the correct pronouns. Many people find it uncomfortable when people give a long apology for misgendering them and it could also potentially out them. When in doubt, it is best to use that person's name. The person can correct you or you can ask them for their pronouns. That way, you decrease the risk of outing them or exposing them to an unsafe situation.

What If I Want to Change My Pronouns?

No one's pronouns are set in stone. People's pronouns relate to their gender identity not their **gender expression**. As people step into who they are, their gender identity can change and that's perfectly okay. You have the right to change your pronouns to match who you are and your gender identity.

What If I Don't Want to Share My Pronouns?

That's ok! Providing space and opportunity for people to share their pronouns does not mean that everyone feels comfortable or needs to share their pronouns. Some people may choose not to share their pronouns for a variety of reasons. For example, they are questioning or transitioning their pronouns, they don't use or like any pronouns, they don't feel comfortable sharing them at that moment or in that space, or they fear bullying or harassment after sharing. Another reason being some TGNCNB people—often those who have worked very hard to attain a gender status other than the one assigned to them at birth—can take offense when not appropriately gendered, because they perceive this as a way that others fail to acknowledge how they are obviously and deliberately presenting their gender identity. In the case that someone has left pronouns off their name tag or chosen not to share their pronouns, please refrain from using pronouns for that person and refer to the person by name to avoid misgendering.

• The multiple ways (for example, behavior, dress, hair style) in which a person may choose to communicate gender to oneself and/or to others.

Why is it Really Important to Respect Someone's Pronouns?

As a human, you are often in a position to make the world a better place for all.

- ◆ Asking others what their pronouns are and consistently using them correctly can determine within the first few minutes if they will feel respected at your establishment or not.
- ◆ You will be setting an example: If you are consistent about using someone's pronouns, others will follow your example.
- ◆ Many people will be learning about pronouns for the first time, so this will also be a learning opportunity for them that they will keep forever.

What is Pronoun Privilege?

If your pronoun is something that never matters to you or that you rarely think about, then you may have pronoun privilege. It is a privilege to not have to worry about which pronoun someone is going to use for you based on how they perceive your gender. This is most common within the **cishet** community.

Cishet refers to someone who is both cisgender and heterosexual. In other words, a cishet person identifies as the gender they were assigned at birth and are attracted to people of the opposite sex.

Resources for supporting TGNCNB Youth

- ◆ Webinar for Educators: Supporting Trans and GNC Students
- ◆ Be a Better Ally to Trans and GNC Youth
- ◆ Know Your Rights: A Guide for Transgender and GNC Students
- ◆ Video on genderfluidity by one of GLSEN's National Student Council members
- ◆ Blogs on nonbinary identity and transgender binary-privilege
- ◆ Make your GSA more Trans and GNC Inclusive
- ◆ The LOFT LGBTQ+Community Center TransMission & PROUDWST-Me

Leading Organizations for Transgender Advocacy:

- ◆ National Center for Transgender Equality – transequality.org
- ◆ Transgender Law Center - transgenderlawcenter.org
- ◆ Trans Student Educational Resources (TSER) - transstudent.org
- ◆ Trans Women of Color Collective - twocc.us

***** Discussing and correctly using Pronouns sets a tone of respect and allyship with transgender, gender non-conforming and non-binary people and the LGBTQ+ community members overall.**

¹ - Developed by Queery Inc.