

Pronouns: A Resource Supporting Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) People

This document is adapted from the factsheet titled "PRONOUNS: A RESOURCE SUPPORTING TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NONCONFORMING (GNC) EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS" produced by GLSEN and found online at www.glsen.org and from online pronoun guide produced by University of California Davis LGBTQIA Resource Center

What are pronouns?

Pronouns are linguistic tools that we use to refer to people. (i.e. they/ them/ theirs, she/ her/ hers, he/ him/ his). It is important to give people the opportunity to state the pronoun that is correct to use when referring to them.

Why focus on pronouns?

You may have noticed that people are sharing their pronouns in introductions, on nametags, and when meetings begin. This is happening to make spaces more inclusive of transgender, gender nonconforming, and gender non-binary people. Including pronouns is a first step toward respecting people's gender identity, working against cisnormativity*, and creating a more welcoming space for people of all genders.

How is this more inclusive?

People's pronouns relate to their gender identity. For example, someone who identifies as a woman may use the pronouns "she/her." We do not want to assume people's gender identity based on gender expression (typically shown through clothing, hairstyle, mannerisms, etc.) By providing an opportunity for people to share their pronouns, you're showing that you're not assuming what their gender identity is based on their appearance. If this is the first time you're thinking about your pronoun, you may want to reflect on the privilege of having a gender identity that is the same as the sex assigned to you at birth (cisgender privilege.)

Where do I start?

Include pronouns on nametags and during introductions. Be cognizant of your audience, and be prepared to use this resource and other resources (listed below) to answer questions about why you are making pronouns visible. If your group has never thought about gender-neutral language or pronouns, you can use this resource as an entry point.

*Cisnormativity is the assumption that all people have a gender identity that matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

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, e.g. 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. In the case that someone has left pronouns off the nametag or chosen not to share their pronouns, please refrain from using pronouns for that person and refer to the person by name.

Misgendering

Misgendering refers to the experience of being labeled by others as a gender other than one that a person identifies with. The essential thing to do after learning someone's pronouns is remembering to use those pronouns when referring to that person. If you accidentally use the wrong pronoun when identifying someone, please correct yourself in front of that person and begin using the right pronoun. Everyone makes mistakes, and making visible your work to respect and use someone's pronoun after a mistake is an important moment to take. It is not the responsibility of the transgender or GNC person to address your feelings after misgendering.

What about PGP?

There has been a shift away from the term "preferred gender pronoun" or "PGP" to using "pronoun." This change was made because a person's pronouns are not just preferred; they're the pronouns that must be used. Learn more about this concept at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iKHjI5xAaA

Make your support visible!

- Include "pronoun:" under "name:" in nametags and introductions as an opportunity for participants to make visible their gender pronouns.
- Include pronouns under signature blocks in emails.
- Put up a sign or statement like this near the nametags, waiting rooms, and/or meeting spaces:
YOUR HEALTH DEPARTMENT IS INCLUDING PRONOUNS BECAUSE WE ARE MAKING OUR SPACES MORE INCLUSIVE OF TRANSGENDER, GENDER NONCONFORMING, AND GENDER NON-BINARY PEOPLE.
- Put up this sign near nametags with pronoun sections:
WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO FILL IN THE PRONOUN SECTION ALONG WITH YOUR NAME, SO THAT WE USE THE CORRECT PRONOUNS WITH EACH OTHER FROM THE BEGINNING. WE HAVE LEFT THE PRONOUN SECTION BLANK SO THAT YOU CAN FILL IN ANY/ALL PRONOUNS YOU USE.

Tips for gender-neutral language:

- If you feel comfortable, introduce yourself with your pronouns as a model. For example: “Hi, I’m Anjelique. I use she/her and they/them pronouns” or “I’m Milo, and I use they/them pronouns.”
- Practice, practice, practice! Use gender-neutral pronouns such as “they” and “ze” while visualizing the person who uses them.
- Whenever possible, take the lead from the transgender and GNC people in your organization, especially during the planning stages.
- Welcome feedback, and be ready to make adjustments as you continue to make your spaces more inclusive: “If you have any feedback for us on how to make this a more welcoming space for transgender, gender nonconforming and gender non-binary people, please let us know!”
- When addressing groups of people or people whose pronouns you haven’t been told, use gender-neutral language such as, “friends,” “folks,” “all,” or “y’all,” rather than “guys,” “ladies,” “ma’am,” or “sir.”

Sample list of pronouns.

Note: This is NOT an exhaustive list, and any combination is possible.

___ laughed.	Ask ___!	That’s ___ pen.	That pen’s ___.	Did ___ enjoy ___?
co	co	cos	cos	coself
en	en	ens	ens	enself
ey	em	eir	eirs	emself
he	him	his	his	himself
she	her	her	hers	herself
they	them	their	theirs	themself
xie	hir (“here”)	hir	hirs	hirsself
yo	yo	yos	yos	yoself
ze ve	zir vis	zir ver	zirs ver	zirself verself

Example: Ze reminded zirself to pick up zir umbrella before going outside.

<p>How you could ask: “What pronouns do you use?” “What pronouns would you like me to use?”</p>	<p>How you could share: “I’m Jade and my pronouns are ze and hir.” “Leo, I prefer they and them, but he is fine too.” “My pronoun is co.”</p>
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Other approaches to pronouns:

“Just my name, please.”

“No preference!”

“It’s better if you mix ‘em up!”

“No pronouns for me!”

Ways to make language more inclusive:

“Hey, everyone” or “How are all y’all doing?” in a group setting instead of

“Hey guys!” or “Hey ladies!” or “How are you guys doing?”

“They are a first year” when referring to a scholar instead of “they are a freshman”

Notice when someone refers to another person by their occupation if you naturally use a particular pronoun. (i.e. Person A: “I just got back from the doctor’s office.” Person B: “What did he say?”)

Other resources from GLSEN for supporting Trans/GNC Youth:

Be a Better Ally to Trans and GNC Youth

www.glsen.org/allyweek/betterallies

Video on genderfluidity by one of GLSEN’s National Student Council Members

www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zL0siwE1DI

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

IMPORTANT TERMS

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Cisgender privilege: Unearned benefits and advantages that come with having a gender identity that is the same as the sex assigned at birth.

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

Gender: A set of cultural identities, expressions and roles – codified as feminine or masculine – that are assigned to people based upon the interpretation of their bodies, and more specifically, their sexual and reproductive anatomy. Since gender is a social construction, it is possible to reject or modify the gender one is assigned at birth, and to develop, live and express a gender that feels truer and just to oneself.

Gender binary: A socially constructed system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two categories, “male” and “female,” in which no other possibilities for gender are believed to exist. The gender binary is a restrictive and inaccurate way to view gender because it does not take into account the diversity of gender identities and gender expressions among all people. The gender binary is oppressive to anyone that does not conform to dominant societal gender norms.

Gender expression: The multiple ways (e.g., behaviors, dress) in which a person may choose to communicate gender to oneself and/or to others.

Gender identity: 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, and everyone has both a gender identity and a sexual orientation.

Gender non-conforming: A descriptive term and/or identity of a person who has a gender identity and/or expression that does not conform to the traditional expectations of the gender they were assigned at birth. People who identify as “gender nonconforming” or “gender variant” may or may not also identify as “transgender.”

Gender non-binary: An umbrella term for gender identities used by people whose gender is not exclusively male or female. Non-binary gender describes any gender identity which does not fit the male and female binary. Those with non-binary genders can feel that they:

- Have an androgynous (both masculine and feminine) gender identity, such as androgyne.
- Have an identity between male and female, such as intergender.
- Have a neutral or unrecognized gender identity, such as agender, neutrois, or most xenogenders.
- Have multiple gender identities, such as bigender or pangender.
- Have a gender identity which varies over time, known as genderfluid.
- Have a weak or partial connection to a gender identity, known as demigender.
- Are intersex and identify as intersex, known as amalgagender
- Have a culturally specific gender identity which exists only within their or their ancestor's culture.

Non-binary people may also identify as transgender and/or transsexual.

Pronouns: The pronoun or set of pronouns that a person identifies with and would like to be called when their proper name is not being used. Examples include "she/her/hers," "he/him/his," "ze/hir/hirs," and "they/them/theirs." Some people prefer no pronouns at all.

Transgender: An umbrella term describing people whose gender identity does not match the gender they were assigned at birth.