

Gender Pronouns

How to Take Important Steps in Becoming a TGNC Ally!

(TGNC = Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming)

What is a Pronoun?

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (like *I* or *you*) or someone or something that is being talked about (like *she*, *I*, *them*, and *this*). Gender pronouns (like *he* and *hers* and *them*) specifically refer to people that you are talking about.

What is a “Gender Pronoun”?

A “gender pronoun” is the pronoun that a person chooses to use for themselves. Gender Pronouns are the pronouns that we use to refer to people in sentences and conversation.

What are some examples of Gender Pronouns?

Gender pronouns can look like and are not limited to

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

Here are examples of Gender Pronouns in use.

➤ *She, Her, Hers*

If Chris’s gender pronouns are *she*, *her*, and *hers*, you could say "Chris ate *her* food because *she* was hungry."

➤ *They, them, theirs* (Chris ate *their* food because *they* were hungry.)

This is a pretty common gender-neutral pronoun.... And yes, it *can* in fact be used in the singular. You can use this pronoun as a neutral identifier if you are unsure what pronoun someone uses.

➤ *Ze, hir* (Chris ate *hir* food because *ze* was hungry.)

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*.

➤ *Just my name please!* (Chris ate Chris's food because Chris was hungry)

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

Why is it important to respect people's Gender Pronouns?

You can't always know what someone’s gender pronoun is 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, it 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 TGNC people. Repeatedly being misgendered can be a source of great distress.

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. Outing someone is when you do something to expose someone's identity without their consent.

How Do You Ask Someone About Their Pronouns?

Try asking: "What are your gender pronouns?" or "Which pronouns do you use?" or "Can you remind me which pronouns you use for yourself?" It can feel awkward at first, but it is not half as awkward as getting it wrong or making a hurtful assumption.

Asking people about their gender pronouns has become common place in LGBTQI and safe-space communities. Outside of those communities, asking someone about their gender pronouns is greatly appreciated instead of making assumptions about someone's gender pronouns.

Asking someone about their gender pronouns can look like but is not limited to:

- "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?"

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

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

- "Chris is going on Tour. She - sorry, they said they are really excited for this year's lineup."

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 neutral pronouns like they/them/ theirs. The person can correct you or you can ask them for their gender pronouns. That way, you decrease the risk of outing them or exposing them to an unsafe situation.

What If I Want to Change My Gender Pronouns?

Gender pronouns are not set in stone. As people step into whom they are, their pronouns can change, and that's perfectly okay. You have the right to change your gender pronouns to match who you are and your gender identity.

Why is it really important to respect someone's Gender Pronouns as a Provider, Vendor, or Agency Staff?

As a provider, you are often in a position of power.

- Asking your participants what their gender 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 gender pronouns, others will follow your example.
- Many participants will be learning about gender 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 gender 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.

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 gender pronoun is, you can try something like this: "Tell us your name, where you come from, and your gender pronoun. That means the pronoun you like to be referred to with. For example, I'm Chris, I'm from New York, and I like to be referred to with she, her, and hers pronouns. So you could say, 'she went to her car' if you were talking about me."

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