



A Pronoun Primer

What are pronouns?

Pronouns are words used to refer to people without using their names, such as I, you, she, them, himself. **Everyone has pronouns!** She/her, he/him, and they/them are the most common pronouns, but there are many, many more. Being addressed by the wrong pronoun can increase feelings of alienation, dysphoria, depression and anxiety¹ so taking care to use people's correct pronouns is an easy way to create a safer space for everyone.

Some people want others to use the two pronouns interchangeably, some people are okay if you pick one and stick with it. Some want specific pronouns for different contexts (e.g. someone might prefer they/them, but use he/him at work because they haven't come out to their boss.)

You can ask that person what they prefer, or listen to how they refer to themselves.

What does it mean when someone has two sets of pronouns?

How do I ask someone what pronouns they use?

Remember, not everyone feels safe or comfortable sharing their pronouns, so don't force someone to disclose their pronouns. They/them/theirs is a good choice until you are told otherwise.

Keep it simple: **“What pronouns do you use?”** or share your own pronouns first to invite others to do the same: **“My name is Alex and I use she/her pronouns.”** It may feel uncomfortable at first, but with practice it will be as easy as sharing your name.

We all make mistakes. You might feel embarrassed or guilty about messing up someone's pronouns, but it doesn't have to be a big deal. It is more considerate to **just apologize, correct yourself, and move on:**

“He said—oops, sorry, she said to park on the driveway.”

What should I do if I make a mistake?

1. Parr, N. J. & Howe, B. G. (2022). Heterogeneity of Transgender Identity Nonaffirmation Microaggressions and Their Association With Depression Symptoms and Suicidality Among Transgender Persons. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, Publish Ahead of Print, doi: 10.1037/sgd0000347.



Common Pronouns (and how to use them)

There are many sets of pronouns, these are just a few.
If in doubt about how to use or pronounce someone's pronouns, just ask!

She/her/hers

"She has red hair. I haven't seen her. That jacket is hers."

He/him/his

"He has brown eyes. I talked to him in class. His car is there."

They/them/theirs

"They wear glasses. I met them already. That cat is theirs."

Ze/zir/zirs

"Ze is biking. I went with zir. The idea was zirs."

Pronounced "zee," "zur," and "zears" (rhymes with she, her, hers).

Ey/em/eirs

"Ey plays soccer. I'm the same age as em. Dan got eirs already."

Pronounced "ay," "em," and "airs" (rhymes with they, them, theirs).

Xe/xem/xyrs

"Xe is taller. Sandy is shorter than xem. Can I see xyrs?"

Pronounced "zee," "zem," "zear" (rhymes with they, them, theirs)

No pronouns

"Jay was here. Jay's dog is brown. Mine is next to Jay's."

Some people prefer not to use pronouns at all, in which case you can use their name in place of the pronoun.

You can't always know someone's pronouns based on the way they look, and you can't know someone's gender based on their pronouns. Remember not to make assumptions and to practice any pronouns that you find difficult! You've got this!

