Pronouns 101

What Is A Pronoun?

A pronoun is a word used to refer to either the people who are talking (like "I" or "you") or a person being talked about in the third person (like "she/her", "he/him" and "they/them"). In the English language, pronouns are gendered. So, when referring to someone in the third person, you are assigning a gender to their identity. Pronouns can sometimes take the place of a person's name. Both cisgender and transgender people use pronouns to define their gender identity and not everyone uses just one set of pronouns. Some use multiple pronouns or any pronouns and some don't use pronouns at all, preferring to be referred to only by their name. It is important to be intentional about the way we use pronouns so we can create an affirming, inclusive environment for everyone.

Why Do Pronouns Matter?

Ask yourself how many times someone has used your name or a pronoun to refer to you today. Now, imagine that your co-worker, a teacher, a doctor, friend or family member routinely called you by the wrong name or pronoun. That might make you feel confused, invisible, or even hurt. That is why using a person's name and pronouns that they go by are essential to affirming their identity and showing basic respect. The experience of being misgendered–having someone use the incorrect pronouns or name to refer to you–can be uncomfortable and harmful, and the experience of accidentally misgendering someone can be difficult for both parties. Routinely asking and providing pronouns helps everyone avoid assumptions and feel comfortable. When you share your pronouns, you simply are sharing more about yourself and how you want people to refer to you.

Pronoun Etiquette Tips

+ **Create opportunities for people to share their pronouns and create a culture of pronoun sharing at your company, school, or organization**. For example, when introducing yourself share your pronouns like this:

  - *In one-on-one conversation:* "Hi, I'm John and I use he/they pronouns. Nice to meet you."

  - *In a meeting:* "Hi everyone. I'm Mollie. I'm the school nurse and I go by they/them."

  - *In front of your students:* "Hello class! I'm Mx. Andrews, I use she/her and they/them pronouns."

  - *In your email signature next to your name:* Aliya Wilson (pronouns: she/her/hers)

+ **Always use someone's pronouns and name unless you've been asked not to** for a specific reason (e.g., safety or privacy concerns). This is particularly true for youth and those who recently came out and shared a new pronoun or name. Remember, just because someone is out to you it does not mean they are out to everyone.

+ **Practice! Practice! Practice!** It takes intention to consistently use someone's correct pronouns if you previously used different pronouns for that person or if you're using pronouns that are new to you (e.g. they/them or ze/hir). Take the time to practice referring to the person with the correct pronouns with yourself to increase your confidence in future conversations and written correspondence. Practice with your colleagues, family, and friends so everyone has an opportunity to practice.

+ **If you make a mistake, apologize and move on.** Help others by gently correcting them if they misgender someone and alleviating the burden of doing so from your transgender or gender-expansive peers. Don't center your feelings if you make a mistake and recognize that many people make mistakes. What's important is to apologize, move on, and try to do better by being more consistent in using the right name and pronoun.

Pronouns Guide

The following is a short guide for commonly used pronouns. Language is always changing and evolving including pronouns, and HRC has created a supplemental guide on Neopronouns that expands on the list below.

She/Her/Hers	He/Him/His	They/Them/Theirs	Ze/Zir/Zirs	Ze/Hir/Hirs
She is here now.	He is here now.	They are here now.	Ze is here now.	Ze is here now.
Her phone call just started.	His phone call just started.	Their phone call just started.	Zir phone call just started	Hir phone call just started
She excused herself from the meeting.	He excused himself from the meeting.	They excused themself from the meeting.	Ze excused zirself from the meeting.	Ze excused hirself from the meeting.
Let's wait for her.	Let's wait for him.	Let's wait for them.	Let's wait for zir.	Let's wait for hir.