

Tip Sheet

Understanding & Using Pronouns

VisionSpring
Inclusion Learning Loop

Understanding & Using Pronouns Tip Sheet

Language surrounding identity is constantly evolving. And while using non-binary pronouns might be challenging and at first uncomfortable, using someone's personal gender pronoun is as important as using their correct name. It takes awareness, understanding and practice. Here are some tips for getting it right.

1. **Normalize Pronouns** - Normalize pronouns by including your pronouns in email signatures or on social media bios. This helps to normalize the idea that people shouldn't just assume they can tell someone's pronoun based on how a person looks or the traditional gendering of a name.
2. **Ask** - Ask everyone their pronouns, not just the person you think might be trans or non-binary. Make asking pronouns as natural as asking what someone's name is when you meet.
3. **Make an Effort** - The only way to get better at using non-binary pronouns is to step outside of your comfort zone. Forget what you think you know about grammar and make an effort to respect someone's identity by using their pronouns.
4. **Practice** - Using gender-neutral pronouns can feel strange and unnatural and it can take practice to get it right. To build that comfort level and reduce the associated anxiety requires practice. Embrace the discomfort, be ok with the trepidation and commit to the purposeful effort and using gender-neutral pronouns will become as customary as she and hers.
5. **Don't assume** - You can't tell a person's gender identity or pronouns based on how they look. Gender presentation isn't the same as gender identity, and neither presentation nor identity are an indicator of what pronouns someone uses. The only way to know what someone's pronouns are is to ask. Also, don't assume that someone's pronouns are fixed. Gender is fluid, and their pronouns may (or may not) change over time.
6. **Make Sharing Pronouns Normal Protocol** - Invite (not mandate) people to share their PGP - Preferred Gender Pronoun or Personal Gender Pronoun (the latter being the most inclusive phrasing as it doesn't insinuate respecting someone's pronouns is optional) in your ice breakers/introductions when you start a meeting. Include a place for pronouns on your name tags/badges.
7. **Apologize- Mistakes Happen** - When you misgender someone say you are sorry, and fix your language moving forward.
8. **Use Non-binary Greetings** - Instead of saying "ladies" or "guys" to a group of people try to incorporate language that isn't gendered like "folks," "y'all," "friends" etc. into your vocabulary.
9. **Correct** - When you hear someone use the wrong pronouns for a mutual friend correct them. Part of being a good ally to non-binary, genderqueer, and trans people in your community is helping other people get our pronouns right.
10. **One Size Doesn't Fit All** – Personal gender pronouns are very much a part of a person's identity and each person's personal pronouns are just that – personal. And while people have become more comfortable using they as non-binary singular pronoun, it is not every non-binary person's pronoun. Again, asking is the best way to ensure you are being inclusive and respectful.

Adapted from [Sassafras Lowrey's](#) Guide to Non-binary Pronouns and Why They Matter